FIVE NṚSIṀHA TEMPLES IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND THEIR FUNCTION AS A RELIGIOUS COLLECTIVE

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on five temples dedicated to Nṛsiṁha that are situated along the Kṛṣṇā River in the region of Andhra Pradesh, India. The temples are located at Vadapalli and Mattapalli in Nalgonda District, Ketavaram and Mangalagiri in Guntur District, and Vedadri in the Krishna District. Although built during different time periods, the five Nṛsiṁha temples function as a religious collective. While some of the temples have been the subject of individual study, the temples as a group have received very little attention from scholars. My research provides the first contextual analysis of the five temples as a group.

Religious cults have played a significant role in molding the life and institutions of India from early times. Among the Vaiṣṇava religious practices, the cult of Nṛsiṁha, the fourth incarnation of the Hindu god Viṣṇu, is an important and powerful one. Nṛsiṁha, the Man-Lion incarnation, one of the ten main incarnations of Viṣṇu, came to earth to rescue the world from an evil king named Hiraṇyakaśipu. There are numerous centers of Nṛsiṁha worship spread across India. However, Nṛsiṁha seems to be particularly popular and important in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Based on original field research conducted in the Andhra Pradesh region, this study documents and examines each of the five monuments separately, and explores the nature of their association as a group of five. Through this investigation, I have identified three prevalent iconographic themes that are associated with the five temples. These are the role of the goddess Lakṣmī as the primary *śakti* of Nṛsiṁha; the importance of the Kṛṣṇā River; and, the underlying Tantric affiliation within the Vaiṣṇava ritual practices. Additionally, my findings show that the iconographic program of the five temples and the Kṛṣṇā River parallels Vaiṣṇava Tantric practices, and correlates the macrocosm of the universe with the microcosm of a *yogin's* body.

Finally, my investigation brings to light previously little known monuments and the devotion to Nṛsiṁha that is so prevalent in Andhra Pradesh region. In addition, this study contributes to the broader knowledge about Hindu temple customs, pilgrimage practices, ritual conventions, and local traditions that are associated with Nṛsiṁha, through the examination of collective grouping of temples as a phenomenon.

Dedicated to Śrī and Prema Vedagiri

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Situated along the banks of the Kṛṣṇā River in Andhra Pradesh, India, are five temples dedicated to Nṛsiṁha, one of the ten incarnations of the Hindu god Viṣṇu (Figure 1.1). Collectively known as *Pancanṛsiṁha Kṣetram*, the five Nṛsiṁha temples are considered by devotees to be a group. These five Nṛsiṁha temples are located at Vadapalli and Mattapalli in Nalgonda District, Ketavaram and Mangalagiri in Guntur District, and Vedadri in the Krishna District. The pattern of grouping individual and sometimes disparate religious monuments into some type of a "temple collective" is a phenomenon encountered throughout India, although one that has been little studied.

In India, there are innumerable religious sites that are acknowledged as important temple centers. All of them promise manifold benefits to their visitors, and each typically claims superiority over all other temples. At the same time, each temple site may contribute to a wider sacred geography. A temple may mark and commemorate a particular sacred event, such as a deity's distinctive manifestation at the

site. Such sites can then be related to each other, mapping out a totality of the divine against a sacred landscape.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, the worship of Nṛsiṁha is particularly emphasized, as indicated by the existence of a large number of temples dedicated to this deity The *Anuṣṭubh mantra* of Nṛsiṁha clearly states that Viṣṇu manifested himself into nine different forms of Nṛsiṁha, known as the *Navanṛsiṁha*.[1] These nine forms together constitute the core nature of Nṛsiṁha as a supreme being. Consequently, one or more of these nine forms are visible in all the hundreds of temples situated in various parts of Andhra Pradesh, as seen in the case of the five Nṛsiṁha temples comprising this study.[2] My research illustrates the role of these five Nṛsiṁha temples in the larger religious life of Andhra Pradesh, and helps provide an understanding of the function of Nṛsiṁha in the Vaiṣṇava pantheon as a whole.

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To discuss the architectural layout and iconography at each of the five temples, and thereby shed light on their similarities and differences.

[1] Hemendra Nath Chakravorty, trans. and annotated, *The Nārada Purāṇā*, part 3. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), pp.1008-1029; Pandit V. Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* (Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1986), pp. 202-204.

2. To understand how the temples function as a group, including the history and nature of the relationship between the five Nṛsiṁha temples, and, the significance of their related ritual practices.
3. To understand the importance of Nṛsiṁha veneration in the region of Andhra Pradesh, and the role of the temples in the larger religious context.

Political and Historical Development of Vaisnavism in Andhra Pradesh

Epigraphic and excavated archaeological materials suggest that the worship of Viṣṇu, and, in particular, Nṛsiṁha was established in the Andhra region no later than the beginning of the Christian Era. The early history of Andhra Pradesh, comprising a continuous account of political and cultural events, commences with the rise of the Satavahanas (3rd century B.C.E. - 3rd century C.E.) as an imperial power. The Satavahanas ruled over Andhra, including the Deccan, for more than three centuries, and are considered to be one of the great empire-builders in the history of India. The age of the Satavahanas was a period of intense religious activity in Andhra Pradesh. The Satavahanas were primarily Hindus who performed Vedic sacrifices, proclaimed Brahmanical status, and donated land to Brahmin communities.[3]

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[2] Narasimhachrya Madabhushini, *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh* (Hyderabad: Sri Ahobila Math, 1989), p. 32.

Excavations at Amaravati and Jaggayyapeta, at the same time, document the popularity of Buddhism under the Satavahanas. The discovery of the famous standing Siva figures from Gudimallam in Chittoor District, assigned to 2nd- 1st century B. C. E., moreover, speak volumes about the apparent religious tolerance and harmony in the region under the Satavahanas, including both Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite practices.[4]

The rise of the Satavahanas synchronized with a militant wave of Brahmanical revival. The Satavahanas asserted their royal status through the performance of Vedic sacrifices, essential to royal legitimization in the Vedic tradition. The Naneghat records of Naganika, queen of Satakarni I, describe the Vedic sacrifices of Satakarni I (180-170 B.C.E.) with an invocation to Sankarsana and Vasudeva, the cult gods of Bhagavatism. A Nasik inscription mentions that he donated villages to gods and visited holy places like Dasapura and Govardhana, thereby suggesting the prevalence of Brahmanic religion centered around *tirthayātra* (pilgrimage), *dānas* (gift giving), and *vratas* (vow observance) prescribed in the *Purāṇās*.[5]

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[3] Carla M. Synopol, "On the edge of Empire: Form and Substance in the Satavahana Dynasty", *Empires,* ed. Susan E. Alcock and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[4] Inguva Karthikeya Sarm, "Gudimallam Sivalayamu," *Indian Archaeology Review*, 1973-74, pp. 1-2.

[5] *Epigraphia Indica*, vol, 8, Nasik Inscriptions no. 2 (Calcutta: Supt. of Govt. Printing, 1892), pp. 60-65.

The *Gargi Saṃhitā Saptaśati*, an anthology of verses attributed to Hala (19-24 C.E.), the seventeenth king of the Satavahanas, helps us to know the society and religion of the Satavahana period.[6] The text suggests that a synthesis of different religious practices was attempted under the aegis of Brahmanical priests and sanctioned by a large quantity of theological literature. Additionally, the text also makes copious references to the incarnations of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Pārvati, along with various other village deities, thereby, forming the basis of the religion that is today broadly known as Hinduism.

Important for this study, new discoveries in the Guntur region of Andhra Pradesh made by I. K. Sarma, the director of the Archaeological Survey of India, Southern Circle, have brought to light an image of Nṛsiṁha (Figure 1.2) dating from the 2nd century, during the Satavahana period.[7] The relief carving is made of greenish limestone and was found amidst the brick debris, apparently of a ruined temple in the village of Mothadaka, Guntur District. The carving shows Nṛsiṁha, seated on a pedestal. Nṛsiṁha's the right hand holds a *cakra* (discus), one of the primary attributes of Viṣṇu, while the left hand rests on the folded left leg. The abraded surface, particularly on the forehead, suggests that the carving had been coated periodically with turmeric during rituals. Sarma

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[6] *Gargi Saṃhitā Saptaśati* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1915), pp. 2-9.

considers this to be the central shrine image of the brick temple that is no longer extant.

The decline and disintegration of the Satavahana Empire left the Andhra country in a state of political chaos, and a number of small feudatory families rose to power in different parts of Andhra. Among the kingdoms that hastened the downfall of the Satavahanas were the Ikṣvākus of the Krishna-Guntur region. The Ikṣvākus, referred to as the Śrīparvatiya Andhras, held power around the region of Nagarjunakonda. During the Iksvāku period, Buddhism, especially in the Kṛṣṇā Valley, was at its height, and the Andhra country was seen as the cradle of Mahayana Buddhism.[8] At the same time, the Brahmins took steps to reinvigorate their system. During the reign of Ehuvala Cāntamūla, the earliest known king of the dynasty, in the 3rd century C. E., vigorous temple building activity was initiated by the Brahmins, with a view to rival the Buddhist institutions and to counteract Buddhist influence and popularity.[9] It was also during this period that Brahmanism underwent a two-fold reformation. On the one hand, the priestly community became the

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[7] Inguva Karthikeya Sarma, "Fresh Evidences on the Cult of Narasimha," *Narasimhapriya* (New Delhi, Sundeep Prakasan, 2000), pp. 301-302.

[8] *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 33 (Calcutta : Supt. of Govt. Printing, 1892), p. 147.

[9] *Epigraphia Indica*, vol 34 (Calcutta : Supt. of Govt. Printing, 1892), p. 18; C. Somasundara Rao, " The Interregnum (180-624 C. E.)," *History and Culture of the Andhras*, eds. M. Nagabhushana Sarma and M. Veerabhadra Sastry (Hyderabad: Telugu University, 1995), pp. 45-59.

backbone of Vedic ritualism, and, on the other, the temple developed into a center of popular Brahmanism.

The position of the Brahmin improved and he came to occupy a crucial position in the society.

> "He was the reservoir of Vedic learning, custodian of ritualist culture, priest in the temple, minister and general at the court and landlord to the peasant in the village."[10]

The archaeological remains at Nagarjunakonda, primarily studied for their famous stupas, have brought to light several Hindu temples that were constructed at the beginning of the Christian era. The temples of the Iksvāku period were built mostly along the banks of the Kṛṣṇā River. Although it is not possible to identify all the temples and fix their precise dates, several temples have yielded inscriptions and images that help ascertain their affiliation and the approximate period of their construction. According to the writings inscribed on a stone pedestal discovered at Nagarjunakonda, an Abhiras king of Western India installed a wooden image of Viṣṇu as *Aṣtabhujaswāmin* (Eight-armed Lord), in 278 C.E.[11] This appears to be the earliest reference to an eight-armed form of Viṣṇu in India. The inscription opens with a salutation to the deity Viṣṇu as *deva-paramadeva Purāṇāpuruṣa Nārāyaṇā*. The name

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[10] Rao, "Interregnum," p. 54.

[11] H. Sarcar and B. N. Misra, *Nagarjunakonda* (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1966), p. 24.

of the deity, *Aṣṭabhujaswāmin*, was also found on one of several conch shells from the site.

One of the earliest examples of Nṛsiṁha (Figure 1.3) is the plaque from the Kondamatu region of Guntur District dating from the late 3rd century.[12] Here, Nṛsiṁha is represented as a large seated lion with two upraised arms holding a *cakra*, or discus, in his left hand and probably a mace in his right hand. He is flanked by five male figures that have been identified on various occasions as the *Pancavīrās*, or the five heroes of the Vriṣni clan. According to M. L. Nigam, the five male figures are identified as the *vyuha* (emanations) of the deity Viṣṇu described in the Pāñcarātra texts, thereby giving the earliest evidence of the establishment of the worship of Nṛsiṁha according to the Pāñcarātra doctrines.[13]

The post-Satavahana/Iksvāku period between the 4th to the 7th centuries C.E. constitutes a definite and important landmark in the religious history of Andhra Pradesh. The rise of important dynasties, such as the Pallavas, the Salankayanas, and the Viṣṇukundins, to name a few, correspond with the prevalence of the Brahmanical faith. It was during this period that Vedic sacrifice assumed socio-political significance,

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12 Abdul Waheed Khan, *An Early Sculpture of Narasimha* (Hyderabad: The Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1964); According to the Sanskrit text *Brhad Araṇyaka Upaniṣad* Viṣṇu is said to have adopted the lion form rather than that of the man-lion. Moreover, scholars such as Hans Bakkar have suggested that a lion-like deity was worshipped in the tribal regions of Andhra Pradesh before being adopted by mainstream Vaiṣṇavism.

13 M. L. Nigam, "Early Iconography of Viṣṇu in Andhra Pradesh," *Indian Arts and Culture* (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1987), pp. 342-351.

giving recognition to the social status, legitimacy, and the political power of the dynasties. After the decline of the Iksvāku dynasty, the Pallavas held lordship over southern and eastern Andhra.

Despite the limitations of archaeological data in Andhra Pradesh, the study of personal names of this period may throw some light on the status of Brahmanism, and Vaiṣṇavism in particular. Several Pallava kings were devotees of Visnu in the form of Nṛsiṁha, as indicated by their very names: Siṁhavarman, Simhaviṣṇu, and Nṛsiṁhavarman, for example, were popular kings of the dynasty. The earliest name in the family of Pallava kings is Simhavarman of Manchikallu, as given in an inscription in Guntur District, datable to 290 C. E.[14] Other personal names mentioned in the inscriptions at Amaravati and Karle show the importance of Hindu deities, like Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, Skanda, and so on. Since the personal names are likely to reflect the beliefs and customs of contemporary society, they may be useful guides in measuring the status of a religion. A sculptural panel (Figure 1.4) from Kunidena in Guntur District effectively portrays the range of Hinduism with its multiplicity of gods, and stands as a notable instance of integration of different cults within the fold of Hinduism. The relief panel is made of limestone and measures approximately 26.7 x 19.1 cm. Stylistically, the sculpture can be dated to the 4th century C.E., that is, the late Ikṣvāku/early Pallava

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[14] N. Ramesan, ed., *The Copper Plate Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh*, vol 1.

periods.[15] The figures are arranged in a row. The first figure on the left is a three-headed image of Brahma seated on a lotus. The second image is a Śiva *linga* on a pedestal with the figure of Śiva's bull, Nandi, below. The third is a standing figure of a female goddess with a lotus head. Next, is a male figure identifiable as Kārttikeya by the spear in his right hand. The fifth image is Nṛsiṁha, shown as a squatting lion. Although the posture of this figure is similar to the image from the Kondamotu region, here are no human hands displaying attributes attached to the sides, or,for that matter, any other characteristics that identify it as Visnu.

At the same time that the Pallavas held control of the southern regions of the Kṛṣṇā River, the north was under the rule of the Viṣṇukundins. Most of the Viṣṇukundin rulers were Vaiṣṇava, and it was during their rule that Vaiṣṇavism established itself firmly in the region, enabling the varied and variegated iconography of Viṣṇu to become fully evolved.[16] Under the aegis of the Viṣṇukundins, Yellesvaram and Undavalli became important Vaisnava centers.[17] The caves (Figure 1.5) at Undavalli near Vijayawada in Guntur District illustrate a large form of Visnu *Anantaśayana* (Figure 1.6), as well as several of Viṣṇu's *avatāras*

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[15] Inguva Karthikeya Sarma, "Early Bhu-Varaha and Nrsimha Images from Elal-Govindraopet, District Rangareddy, Andhra Pradesh," *Indian Archaeological Heritage* (New Delhi: n.p. 1991), p. 554.

[16] B. S. L. Hanumantha Rao, *Religion in Andhra* (Hyderabad: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 1993), p. 262.

[17] Rao, *Religion in Andhra*, p. 263.

(incarnations), such as Varāha, Nṛsiṁha, Kṛṣṇa, and Vāmana-Trivikrama.

By the middle of the fifth century, both Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism were clearly in evidence in the region of Andhra Pradesh. While the various forms of Viṣṇu became popular among the Vaiṣṇavites, the subsidiary gods like Kārttikeya and Ganeśa received worship among the Śaivites. The sculptural relief panel (Figure 1.7) recovered from Peddamudiyam in Cuddapah district and assigned to the Visnukundin times reflects the worship of the various figures of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva pantheon.

The next period of Andhra history, from the 7th -14th centuries C. E., is notable for its changes in social, religious, linguistic, and literary activities. One noticeable feature of this period was the immigration of people from numerous parts of the country surrounding the Andhra region. Significantly, most of the dynasties of this period, such as the Eastern and Western Cālukyas, Colas, and Kākatiyas came from outside the region as conquerors.[18] From the beginning of the 7th century to almost the 12th century the state was under the occupation of imperial powers ruling from such capitals as Badami, Manyakheta, and Kalyan, located outside the region. As a result, the major portion of Andhra could only play a subordinate role in the political and cultural history.

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[18] E. Hultzsch, ed. and trans., *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 1 (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972), pp. 31-49.

Inscriptions of the Yādavarāyās, who flourished as the vassals of the Colas during the 12th – 13th centuries, suggest a liberal and tolerant spirit from a religious point of view.[19] The devotional sects of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism were very simple in their doctrine and appealed to the ordinary people since they mostly used the spoken languages in their preaching.[20] The advent of the Eastern Cālukyas marks the beginnings of Telugu literature, as the earliest Telugu records are of this period. While Sanskrit continued to enjoy the patronage of the royalty, the indigenous Telugu language emerged as a literary medium, and several of the Sanskrit epics and *Purāṇās* were translated into the Telugu medium.[21]

In the subsequent period, from the 14th to 18th centuries, the Andhra country was divided territorially into two reigions under the Muslims in Golconda and the Vijayanagara kings. The socio-cultural life under the Qutb Shahis of Golconda was marked by a spirit of broadmindedness based on sharing and adopting of mutual customs and traditions. Concurrently, under the patronage of the Vijayanagar kings, Hinduism received all-round encouragement through the agencies of temples and *maṭhas* (monastery). Both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples

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[19] Sadhu Subrahmanya Sastry, trans. and ed., *Early Inscriptions* (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 1998), p. 101.

[20] Hultzsch, ed. and trans., *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 1, pp. 35; Sastry, trans. and ed., *Early Inscriptions*, pp. 101-142.

[21] C. Sivaramamurti, *Indian Epigraphy and South Indian Scripts*, vol. 3. no. 4 (Madras: Government of Madras, 1966), p. 211.

received liberal donations in the form of villages and lands. The rulers proclaimed themselves as the agents of Śri Virupakṣa (Śiva) or Śrī Venkateśvara (Viṣṇu).[22] There are innumerable records that mention the grants made to several temples and *maṭhas* (monasteries) at Ahobilam, Simhachalam, Tirupati, Mangalagiri, Kanchi, and Bapatla, among others.

The temple of Ahobilam became the primary seat of Vaiṣṇava learning. Many ancient narratives are connected with the site of Ahobilam. However, most importantly, it is believed to be the place of Viṣṇu's primary manifestation as Nṛsiṁha, where he appeared in order to save his devotee Prahlada from the clutches of his father, the demon-king Hiranyakasipu.[23] The popular legendary accounts (*sthalapurāṇā*) about the sanctity and holiness of the temples formed the basis for the emergence of many of the regional traditions. According to V. G. Kṛṣṇāmacharyulu, most of the *sthalapurāṇās* (sacred history) of the Telugu country were composed after the establishment of Muslim rule in Andhra Pradesh.[24] The Islamic religion created a threat to the religious life of the Hindus, and a number

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[22] P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, "Socio-cultural Aspects of Vijayanagara Period," *History and Culture of the Andhras*, ed. M. Nagabhushana Sarma and M. Veerabhadra Sastry. (Hyderabad: Telugu University, 1995), p. 122.

[23] M. S. Ramesh, *"108 Vaisnavite Divya Desam*," vol. 6 (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 1998), p. 5.

[24] V. G. Krishnamacharyulu, *Sthalapuranas in Telugu Country and an inquiry into their Nature* (Waltair: Andhra University Library), p. 26.

of efforts were directed towards revising and strengthening the Brāhmanical religions.

The association of Visnu with kingship and royalty has been made clear by many authors.[25] Historian Robert Sewell enumerates no less than forty kings of the early and medieval periods, who bore the name of Viṣṇu as Nṛsiṁha.[26] Although the idea of God as king is common throughout India, it is in medieval south India that we see the clearest expression of the concept.

> "The sovereign deity is the paradigm of royal authority. By serving this deity, in the form of elaborate gifts that generate special 'royal' honors, and by protecting the redistributive process of the temple, human kings share in this paradigmatic royalty. By being the greatest servant of the sovereign deity, the human king sustains and displays his rule over men."[27]

The Vijayanagar rulers were ardent Vaisnavites, and, in particular, devotees of Nṛsiṁha, as demonstrated by the names of their kings.[28] The royal or divine authority of the kings as protectors of the state was clearly expressed in the establishment of the numerous temples

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[25] J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Charles Drekmeier, *Kingship and community in Early India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962); Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[26] Robert Sewell, *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India* (Madras: University of Madras, 1932).

[27] Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict*, p. 51.

dedicated to Nṛsiṁha during this period.[29] As a result, the *sthalapurāṇās* associated with the temples formed a part and parcel of the local traditions and became powerful instruments for propagating faith among the people in Viṣṇu/Nṛsiṁha and subsequently in their ruler. As Charles Drekmeier points out, it is the functions of the king and not the king himself who is equated to the gods.[30] Although the five temples were built by various patrons over a period of time, they share important features. In addition, the grouping of the *Pancanṛsiṁha* temples seem to be grounded in a range of considerations embracing local traditions and conventions, such as iconographic patterns, ritual practices and sacred history.

Data Collection

As a part of a feasibility study, I visited several Nṛsiṁha temples in Andhra Pradesh during five weeks in August of 1998. Since the temples I visited are presently in use, I compiled a list of the principal practices of

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[28] Sadhu Subramanya Sastry, trans., *Inscriptions of Saluva Narasimha's Time* (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 1998), pp 334-338.

[29] Nelaturi Venkataramanayya, ed., *Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh, Nalgonda District,* vols. 1 & 2 (Hyderabad: The Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1994), pp. 220-262; Mallampalli Somasekhara Sarma, *Corpus of Telangana Inscriptions,* part 4. ed. R. Subrahmanyam (Hyderabad: The Government of Hyderabad, 1973), p. 114; *Epigraphia Indica,* vol. 6. 1900-1901 (New Delhi: Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1981).

[30] Drekmeier, *Kingship*, p. 251.

the temples by meeting with the priestly and lay members of the community at each site. The bibliography of all the secondary materials was compiled during the academic years 1998-2000. This includes the general *puranic* and the local texts associated with Nṛsiṁha and Vaisnavism as a whole

My methodological approach is based on original field research in India, conducted on a Shastri Institute Fellowship during 2000-2001. The five Nṛsiṁha temples and their related sculptures comprise the principal primary source materials used in this dissertation. During my nine months in India, I conducted a thorough photo-documentation of each of these temples by photographing them, and making measurements and drawings, including a detailed study of the layout and architectural form of each of the five temples. Photography was not permitted in the main shrines of the temples at Mattapalli, Ketavaram, Vedadri, and Mangalagiri. However, I was able to view the deities, and make records of the principal practices at each of the temples by participating in and tape-recording the rituals. Interviews conducted with both the priestly and lay members of the community at each site, mentioned above, provided useful information regarding the sacred histories, and rituals, as well as the state and upkeep of each temple.

Primary Literature

As important centers of Nṛsiṁha worship in Andhra Pradesh, the temples at Mattapalli, Vedadri, and Mangalagiri have published brochures or pamphlets known as the *sthalapurāṇā.*[31] These materials record the sacred history, local stories, and important festivals that associated with the temple, and are an invaluable source of specific information on the individual monuments.

More broadly, Hindu *purāṇic* texts record the circumstances that led to the incarnation of Nṛsiṁha. These accounts are treated in varying lengths with minor differences in various *purāṇic* sources.[32] The *Nṛsiṁha Purāṇā* (400-500 C.E.), *Harivamsa* (300-600 C.E.), *Viṣṇu Purāṇā* (300-500 C.E.), *Bhagavata Purāṇā* (800-1000 C.E.), and, the *Padma-Purāṇā* (700-900 C.E.) to name a few, give accounts of this deity's legend in great detail.[33] The Sanskrit text *Nṛsiṁha Purāṇā* translated by Jena

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[31] *Mattapalli sthalapurāṇāmu* (Huzurnagar: Sri Sai Ram Offset); *Vedadri Mahaksetramu sthalapurāṇāmu* (Vedadri: Sri Yogananda Lakṣminṛsimha Devasthanam); Mandapati Ramakrishna Kavi, *Sri Vedachala Mahatyamu; Mangalagiri Sri Panakala Laksmi Narasimha Swamyvari Ksetra Mahatyam* (Mangalagiri: Bhagya Lakshmi Printers and Binders, 1999).

[32] See Chapter 3, pp. 122-125.

[33] Siddheswar Jena, trans. and notes *Śrinarasimhapurāṇam* (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1987), pp. 296-343; N.A. Deshpande, transl and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa,* part 9 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991); Prashuram Laksman Vaidya, ed., *Harivamsa. Khila or Supplement to the Mahabharata.* vol.1 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1969), pp. 286-289; Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, translated and annotated, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* part 3 (Delhi:Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994); H. H. Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam, The Viṣṇu Purāṇa. A system of Hindu Mythology and Tradition.* vol.1 (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1989).

Siddheswara and datable to 5th century C. E., provides the most detailed version of the legend, the importance of the worship of Nṛsiṁha, and the consecration of Nṛsiṁha images in temples. During the 11th – 14th centuries, the Sanskrit Purāṇās were translated into Telugu by famous poets, such as Nannayya and Errapragada, and were thereby made accessible to the laity in Andhra Pradesh. The Telugu *Nṛsiṁha Purāṇamu* by Errapragada was primarily dedicated to the deity installed at the temple of Ahobilam in Western Andhra Pradesh.[34]

Numerous inscriptions engraved on rocks and incised on copper plates attest to the antiquity and the longevity of the five Nṛsiṁha temples. Inscriptions ranging from as early as the 7th century at Vadapalli to the 18th century at Ketavaram suggest the broad dating parameters for the monuments. The main purpose of these records, whether they are left by nobles or private individuals, is to record the grants made for the construction and renovation of the temples. Endowments were made for the general upkeep of the temple and the services of the priests.[35]

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[34] Errapragada, *Śrinarasimha Purāṇam* (Hyderabad: Andhra Book House, 1953).

[35] See Chapter 2, pp. 36-37; P. V. P. Shastry, *A Catalogue of Inscriptions Copied up to 1964* (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1965), p. 123; P. B. Desai, *Select Stone Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh.* Andhra Pradesh Government Archaeological Series, no.9 (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1962); Venkataramanayya, ed., *Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh, Nalgonda District.* Vols. 1 & 2. pp. 220-262; Sarma. *Corpus of Telangana Inscriptions.* part 4. p. 114; *Epigraphia Indica,* vol.6.

State of Scholarship

There is very little art historical documentation on the five Nṛsiṁha temples that comprise this study. However, all five temples have been mentioned in their respective district gazetteers of Andhra Pradesh. A short excerpt on each of the five places in the gazetteers gives us the name of the deity in the temples along with the patron, and the exact geographical location. Further, the entry under the town of Vadapalli lists all five temples as a part of the collective, *Pancanṛsiṁha Kṣetram.*[36]

The *History of the Cult of Nṛsiṁha in Andhra Pradesh*[37] and the *History of the Cult of Nṛsiṁha in Telangana*,[38] both by M. Narasimhacharya are perhaps two of the most useful sources, which outline all the Nṛsiṁha temples in the state of Andhra Pradesh, including the five Nṛsiṁha temples that comprise this study. The books are divided according to the various districts and *taluks* (administrative division of a district) within the two regions of Telangana and Andhra that comprise the modern state of Andhra Pradesh. In both his works, Narasimhacharya gives a brief history of the origins of Nṛsiṁha worship

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[36] M. V. Rajagopal, *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteers. Nalgonda; Krishna; Guntur* (Hyderabad: The Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1977, 1978).

[37] Madabhushini, *Cult of Narasimha in Andhra Pradesh.*

and the impact of the various rulers of South India on the Vaisnava religion. A detailed bibliography of the textual sources written in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit provide an essential resource to the reader. The research also includes the geographical location, architectural layout, sacred history, and the patronage, as well as some of the important festivals at each site. While Narasimhacharya identifies the five Nṛsiṁha temples at Vadapalli, Mattapalli, Ketavaram, Vedadri and Mangalagiri as a group, he does not offer any insights regarding the assemblage of these temples. Moreover, the five temples have not been considered in scholarship in terms of pilgrimage, their location along the Kṛṣṇā River, the role of the river, and the esoteric rituals practiced at the sites.

Some of the literature on the subject of temples in Andhra Pradesh are the *Temples of Andhra Pradesh* by C. S. Vasudevan;[39] *Art and Architecture of Telugu Chola*, by V. K. Mohan;[40] and *Chalukya Temples of Andhradesa*, by B. Rajendra Prasad.[41] These books provide detailed surveys of the architecture, history, and sculptures of select temples in Andhra Pradesh. *The Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh* by N. Ramesan is a survey book that discusses the main temple centers of the

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[38] Narasimhachrya Madabhushini. *History of the Cult of Narasimha in Telengana,* (Hyderabad: Sri Ahobila Matt, 1989).

[39] Michael W. Meister and M. A. Dhaky, ed., *Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture; South India, Upper Dravidadesa.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[40] V. K. Mohan, *Art and Architecture of Telugu Chola* (New Delhi: Kaveri, 1996).

[41] B. Rajendra Prasad, *Chalukya Temples of Andhradesa* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1983).

state.[42] An introduction in Chapter 1 gives a summary of the temple-building practices in India and some of the main characteristics of the temples in Andhra Pradesh. Chapter 7 describes the temple at Mangalagiri and its surrounding areas, including the popular routes of travel. While Ramesan seems knowledgeable in referring to the various legends and prayers associated with Nṛsiṁha, he gives no indication of the textual sources of his citations nor does he include a bibliography.

Another publication, *The Temple in Andhradesa* by A. Suryakumari, is a compilation of the various patrons, donations, committees, rituals, and festivals that are affiliated with a wide range of temples in selected districts of Andhra Pradesh.[43] The author mentions both the Nṛsiṁha temples at Vedadri and Mangalagiri in her work. A single sentence conveys the type of donation, the patron, and the year of donation. However, there is no chronological order to the information nor are the temples discussed at any length.

At the core of Vaiṣṇavism is the premise of Viṣṇu as a Supreme Being, a belief that has found expression in countless stories throughout the centuries. The most popular, and, consequently, the most important, part of Viṣṇu iconography centers around the *avatāras*, the bodily

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[42] N. Ramesan, *Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988).

[43] A. Suryakumari, *The Temple in Andhradesa* (Madurai: Sarvodaya Ilakkiya Pannai, 1982).

descents of Viṣṇu, in which he exercises his function as savior of the world. Vaiṣṇavism, taken as a more or less unified religion, represents the constant effort to bring the growing mass of legends together under one principle and to harmonize the heterogeneous elements from various local traditions. Several books have been written in English that encompass a broad understanding of the religion. Of these, *Vaiṣṇavism* by S. M. Srinivasa Chari[44] offers the most detailed account of the religion, including the origin and the development of Viṣṇu and the role of the goddess Lakṣmī.

Iconographical literature, such as *Pratima-Kosha* by S. K. Ramachandra Rao,[45] *The Elements of Hindu Iconography* by T. A. Gopinatha Rao,[46] and Deborah Soifer's *The Myths of Nṛsiṁha and Vāmana,*[47] provides accounts of the various forms of Nṛsiṁha and Viṣṇu, including the deity's relationship to the other figures of the Vaiṣṇavite pantheon.

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[44] S. M. Srinivasa Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. 1994).

[45] S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Pratima-Kosha Encyclopedia of Indian Iconography* (Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1989).

[46] T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993).

Expected Contribution

The unique aspects of Hindu practices that are associated with Nṛsiṁha help explain the diversity of the religion and the role of Nṛsiṁha in the larger religious life of Andhra Pradesh. Subsequently, the previously unexplored esoteric practices at the five temples will establish the significance and the prevalence of esotericism not only in South Indian art and temple rituals, but also in the larger context of religious practices in South Asia. Through my examination of the five Nṛsiṁha temples, the monuments will be better understood in their own right and more importantly as a part of a religious collective that is greater than the sum of its parts. Further, undertaking a pilgrimage to the five Nṛsiṁha temples, devotees define a sacred geography that parallels on an esoteric level their own religious journey. The theoretical paradigm suggested by this study can serve as a model to analyze other expressions of Hindu practice and therefore will likely have a larger methodological impact on the field.

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[47] Deborah A. Soifer, *The Myths of Nrsiṁha and Vāmana* (New York: State University Press, 1991).

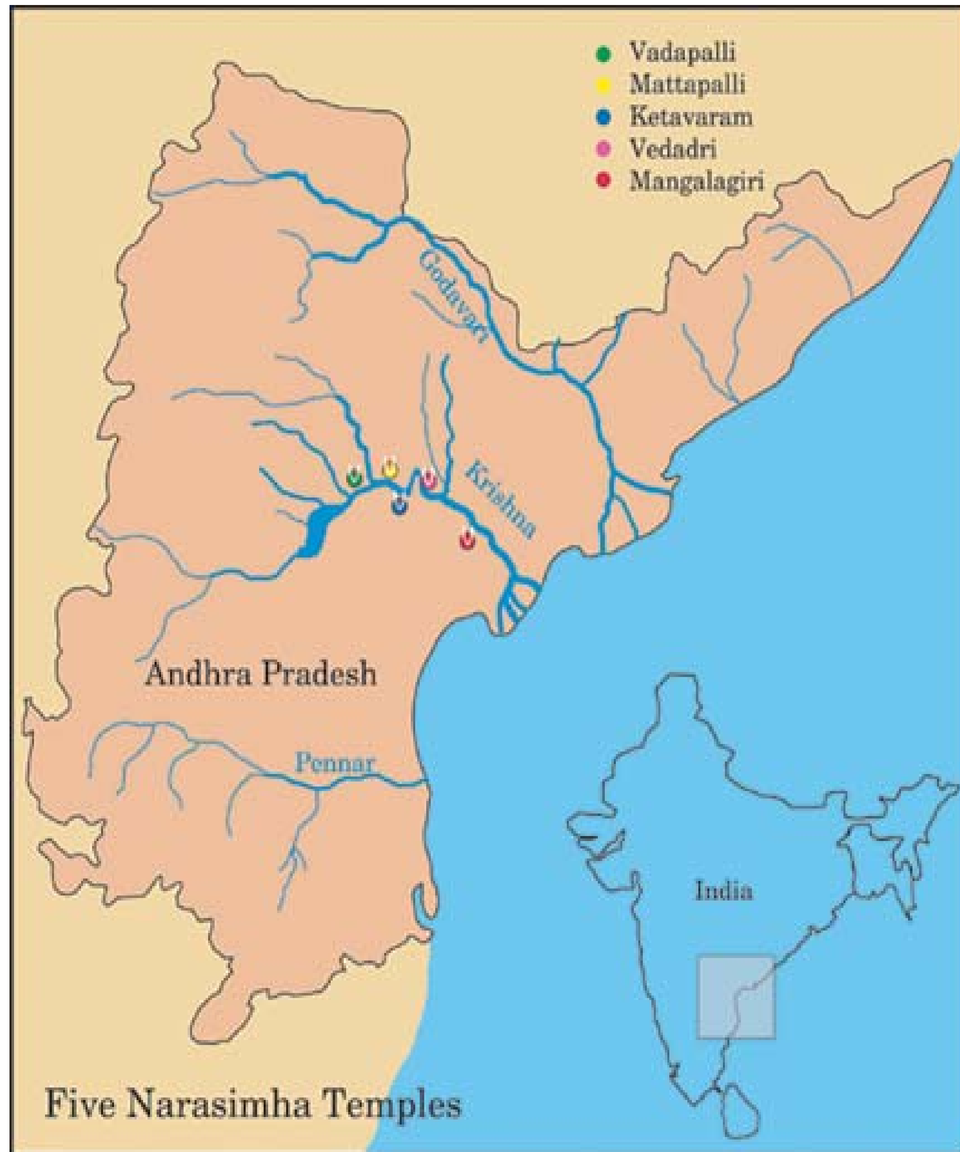


Figure 1.1. Five Nṛsiṁha Temples in Andhra Pradesh,
Drawing by John C. Huntington.



Figure 1.2. Nṛsiṁha, Mothadaka,
Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, 2nd century C.E.



Figure 1.3. Relief with Nṛsiṁha and five male heroes.
Kondamatu, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, 3rd century C.E.

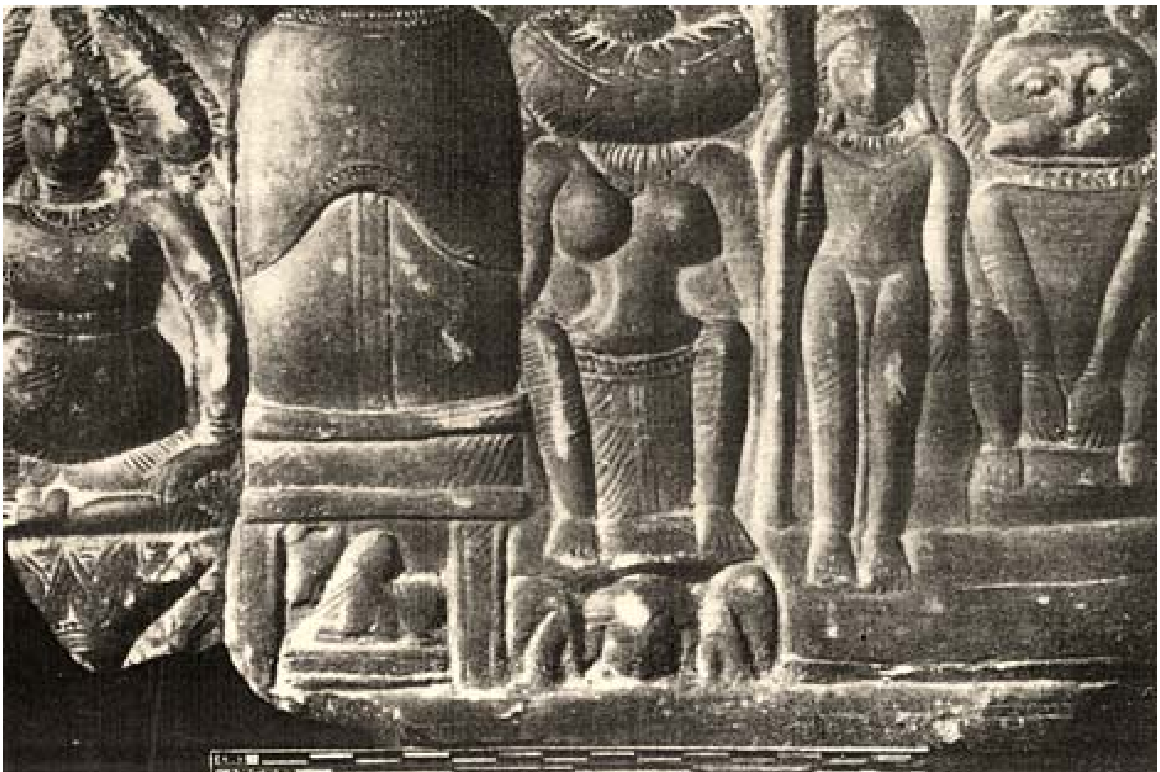


Figure 1.4. Relief panel, Kunidena,
Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, 4th century C.E.



Figure 1.5. Undavalli Caves,
Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, 7th century C.E.



Figure 1.6. Viṣṇu Anantaśayana, Undavalli Caves, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, 7th century C.E.

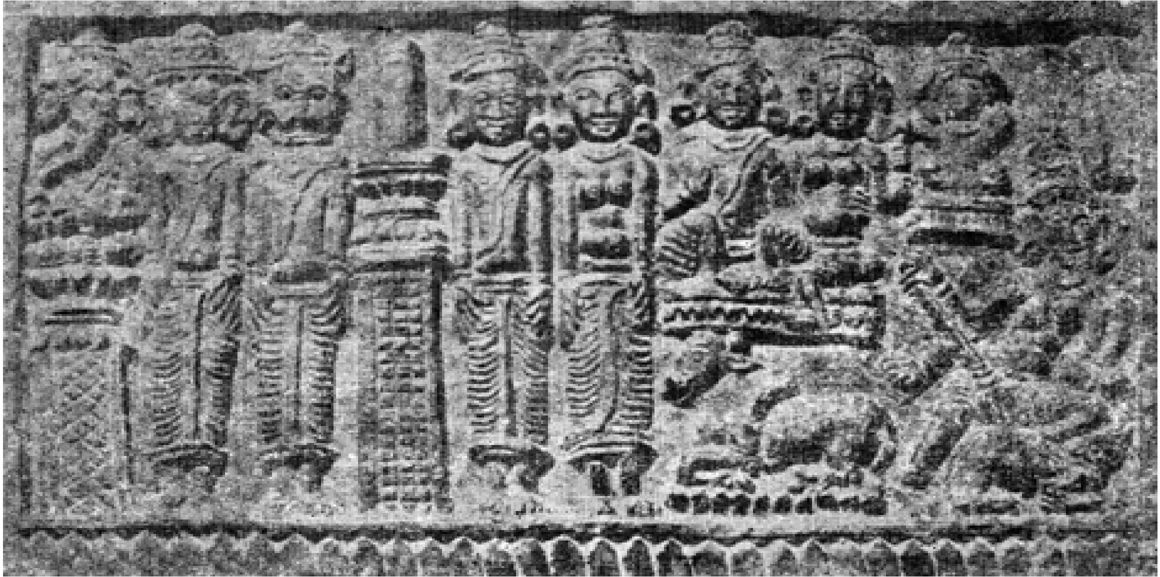


Figure 1.7. Relief panel, Peddamudiyam,
Cuddapah District, Andhra Pradesh, 5th-6th centuries C.E.

CHAPTER 2

THE FIVE NṚSIṀHA TEMPLES AND THEIR PRACTICES

The five Nṛsiṁha temples are situated along the banks of the Kṛṣṇa River (Figure 2.1). Given the varied time periods and the unrelated patrons, it is apparent that the five temples were not originally conceived as a group. Rather, they came to be considered to form a discrete collective at some unknown point in history. In order to accommodate their collective nature, the temples were modified to incorporate new religious meanings and uses. Although the five temples follow the same basic plan of construction, different sections of the temples were patronized at different periods and by different donors, and are continually refurbished to the present day.

Inscriptions ranging from as early as the 7th century at Vadapalli to the 18th century at Ketavaram suggest the dating parameters for the monuments and attest to the antiquity and longevity of the worship of Nṛsiṁha in these areas.[1] A short inscription written in archaic characters of the Kannada language dates the foundation of the Nṛsiṁha temple at

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[1] Venkataramanayya, ed., *Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh, Nalgonda District.* Vols. 1 & 2. pp. 220-262; Sarma. *Corpus of Telangana Inscriptions.* part 4. p. 114; *Epigraphia Indica,* vol.6.

Vadapalli to the 7th century C.E.[2] This inscription is also perhaps the earliest available inscription relating to Nṛsiṁha from this region. It is clearly evident from the inscriptions that patronage often took the form of villages and grants given to the temples by an individual or a group of people who came together predominantly because of a common religious and social identity. It was a customary practice of the times to donate either in kind or in cash for the upkeep of lamps. These lamp and land grants of the temples throw light on the socio-economic patterns of the society. The intention of the patron clearly states that the contribution was an exchange for the acquisition of merit. The donations came substantially from guilds of traders, land owners and to a lesser extent from royalty and families in high political and administrative office.

Common iconographic features at the five Nṛsiṁha temples

There are certain iconographic features that are commonly shared between three or more of the five Nṛsiṁha temples in this study. They are:

1. A central shrine dedicated to Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha.[3]

In the main shrines of the temples located at Vadapalli, Ketavaram, Vedadri and Mangalagiri, are black stone images of Nṛsiṁha with his consort Lakṣmī seated on his left thigh (Figure 2.2). In each case, Nṛsiṁha is four armed, with his upper two hands holding the principal attributes, the *cakra*

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[2] Shastry, *A Catalogue of Inscriptions*, p. 123; Desai, *Select Stone Inscriptions* no.9.

[3] For the significance of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha, see Chapter 3, pp. 131-139.

or the discus and the *śankha* or the conch shell. The primary hands are in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures. The facial features show wide painted eyes with the prominent mark of Viṣṇu in the center of the forehead. The mouth is wide open with a protruding tongue to show the fierce nature of his leonine qualities. In each case, Lakṣmī is two armed and carries a *padma* (lotus) in her left hand.[4] A stone or metal *prabhāmaṇḍala* (aureole) surrounds both the deities.

2. An image of Lakṣmī

Although Lakṣmī is present in the main shrine of the temples, all five temples have either a separate shrine or an image of Lakṣmī within their parameters (Figure 2.3). As a deity in her own right, Lakṣmī embodies certain qualities, such as *daya* (compassion) and *ksama* (forgiveness), to overlook the offences of the devotees.[5] In fact, the most significant role played by the goddess as the consort of Viṣṇu is that of a *purusakara* (interceder or mediator) on behalf of the adherents.[6] The image of the goddess at each of these temples is made of black stone. She is four armed, with the upper two hands holding two lotuses. The lower right and left hands are in the *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada*

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[4] According to the *Viṣṇu Dharmottara Purāṇā,* the image of the goddess Lakṣmī should be represented with two hands when accompanying Viṣṇu, and with four hands if portrayed independently. Priyabala Shah, trans., *Viṣṇu Dharmottara Purāṇā.* A text on Ancient Indian Arts (Ahmedabad: Krishna Printery, 1990), p. 229.

[5] *Lakṣmī Aṣtottaraśatanāmā.* p. 29.

[6] *Lakṣmī Aṣtottaraśatanāmā.* p. 29-33; Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 162.

mudrā (boon bestowal) gestures. For her worship today, she is elaborately dressed in silks and decorated with flowers and ornaments.

3. A shrine dedicated to the monkey god Hanumān.

Hanumān is considered to be the *kṣetrapāla* (guardian of the region) for all Viṣṇu temples in Andhra Pradesh, with the five Nṛsiṁha temples being no exception (Figure 2.4).[7] According to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Hanumān was advised by Rāma to stay on earth forever as his ardent devotee.[8] Hanuman is known by his various epithets, including Mahāvīra (one of great valor), Vāyuputra (son of the wind), Mahābala (one who is possessed with great strength) and Bhajarangi (radiant as a thunderbolt).[9] As a war hero of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa,* the popularity of Hanumān became widespread among the armies during the 10th-15th centuries.[10] a fact that is not surprising since the country was in turmoil due to constant warfare during this period. The disorder contributed massively to the development of the faith of people in Hanumān and accordingly his images started appearing in shrines and temples situated even in remote localities.

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[7] Based on an interview with the priest, G. Śrīnivasacharyulu at the Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple in Vadapalli.

[8] Although this portion of the narrative is associated with the *sthalapurāṇā* (sacred history) of the temple at Mangalagiri, the episode is quite prominent in the various regional versions from both north and south India during the 10th-16th centuries. R. B. L. Baij Nath, trans., *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (New York: AMS Press, 1974).

[9] Goswami Tulasi Dasa, *Hanumān Chālisa* (Rajamundry: Gollapudi Veeraswamy Son, 1983). Tulasi Dasa was an acclaimed poet in the 16th century.

[10] Shanti Lal Nagar, *Hanumān in Art, Culture, Thought and Literature* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1995), pp. 106-107.

4. A shrine to Sage Vikhānasa and his disciples.[11]

At the Nṛsiṁha temples located at Mattapalli, Vedadri, and Mangalagiri, are separate shrines dedicated to the founders of the Vaikhānasa doctrines, Vikhānasa and his four followers, Atri, Bhṛgu, Marīci and Kaśyapa (Figure 2.30). The Temple at Vadapalli, follows the Pāñcarātra doctrines and hence does not support images of the Vaikhānasa saints within its premises.

5. A shrine to the Tamil saint-poets, Ālvārs.[12]

The Nṛsiṁha temples of Vadapalli, Mattapalli, Vedadri, and Mangalagiri, have a separate shrine dedicated to the south Indian poets, Ālvārs (Figure 2.29). While the practices at the Nṛsiṁha temple of Ketavaram show an infusion of the rituals promoted by the Ālvār saints, due to the small size of the complex and the lack of financial support, the images of the saint are absent at this temple.

Sacred History and Key Iconographic Elements at the Five Nṛsiṁha Temples in Andhra Pradesh

Most of the temples in South India have a local legend or sacred story known as the *sthalapurāṇā*, attached to them. The significance of the temple legends cannot be disregarded as they unite the place with the stories

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[11] See below pp. 53-59.

[12] See below pp. 65-67.

recorded in the Purāṇās, enhancing the importance of the place, and and providing claim to greater antiquity. These legends detail the local history as well as the miracles that result from worshipping the deity. To impress upon the minds of the devotees who visit the temples, the *sthalapurāṇās* (sacred histories) are read out by the pilgrim guides as well as by the priests.

As in the case of other Hindu temples, the Five Nṛsiṁha temples comprising this study have *sthalapurāṇās* (sacred histories), which offer reasonable explanation of the circumstances under which the temple originally received its sanctity. Moreover, the temples at Mattapalli, Vedadri and Mangalagiri have printed the narratives of the temples either as a pamphlet or book that is given to the pilgrims. In the following section, I will discuss the *sthalapurāṇās* of the five temples as well describe the key iconographic features that pertain to my research.

Vadapalli

The Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy temple is situated to the north of the village of Vadapalli in the Miryalagudem Taluq of the District of Nalgonda at the confluence of Musi and Krishna Rivers (Figure 2.5). As this was the *vada* (place of residence) of boatmen plying across the Kṛṣṇā River, it was named Vadapalli. Subsequently, it was called Vazirabad by the Muslim rulers. The sacredness of the temple comes from the two lamps that are kept burning at all times in front of the image of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. The lower lamp continually flickers, while the other remains constant. The devotees firmly

believe that the flickering is caused by the respiration of Nṛsiṁha, as the lamp is directly under his nose, thereby confirming his ever-presence in the temple.

The temple faces south. A red and white compound wall surrounds the central structures (Figure 2.6). A small shrine dedicated to Garuḍa, the vehicle of Nṛsiṁha, and a *dhvajastambha* (flagstaff) face the main entrance (Figure 2.7). A black stone image of Garuḍa faces north towards the central shrine (Figure 2.8). Garuḍa is standing with his hands in *anjali mudrā* (gesture of respect). His wings are spread out behind him, and the image is smeared with *kumkuma* (red powder used in worship).

The entranceway opens directly into an enclosed porch with openings into the east and west courtyards (Figure 2.9). Along the north wall are two *dvārapālas* on either side of a central door. The guardians are standing with the right leg crossed over the left. Their right hands rest on a mace, while the left hand hangs down (Figure 2.10).

A second *mandapa* (pillared chamber) contains the subsidiary images of the temple (Figure 2.11). To the right of the shrine door is an image of Lakṣmī (Figure 2.12). She is seated on a lotus with her upper hands holding a *padma* or lotus in each. The lower hands are in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures. To the left of the shrine door on the east are the images of the twelve Tamil poets or saints known as Ālvārs (Figure 2.13). The saints are made of black stone and today are dressed in colorful silk materials. Along the west wall is an image

of Hanumān (Figure 2.14). He is seated in a yogic posture with his legs crossed and bound by a band. His hands are in *anjali mudrā* (salutation gesture).

The antechamber in front of the main shrine contains metal images of Nṛsiṁha flanked on either side by his consorts, Lakṣmī on his right and Bhu or the Earth goddess, on his left (Figure 2.15). Nṛsiṁha in the center is four armed, with his upper right and left hands holding his primary attributes, the *cakra* (discus) and the *śankha* (conch shell), respectively. His primary hands are in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures. The two goddesses on either side are two armed and hold a lotus in their outer hands. These are primarily used in festivals as processional images. In front of Nṛsiṁha is a tray with a small image of the deity, seated with the goddess Lakṣmī on his left thigh.

In the main shrine is a black stone image of Nṛsiṁha with his consort Lakṣmī seated on his left thigh (Figure 2.16). He is four armed, with his upper right and left hands holding his attributes, the *cakra* (discus) and the *śankha* (conch shell) respectively encased in a metal covering, while the primary hands are in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures. The facial features show wide painted eyes with the prominent mark of Visnu in the center of the forehead. The mouth is wide open with a protruding tongue to show the fierce nature of his leonine qualities. The goddess Laksmi, seated on Nṛsiṁha's left thigh is two armed with her left hand holding a *padma* (lotus). Both figures are

currently dressed in silk garments. A metal *prabhāmaṇḍala* (aureole) surrounds the two deities. Although not directly in front of the temple, a pathway leads to the Krishna River on the south side (Figure 2.17).

Mattapalli

Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy temple is located in the suburbs of Mattapalli village in the Huzurnagar Taluq of Nalgonda District (Figure 2.18). The temple is in a cave in the midst of a dense forest, on the banks of the Kṛṣṇa River. The *sthalapurāṇā* (sacred history) of the temple states that Nṛsiṁha appeared in a dream to Śrī Anumala Machireddi, a ruler of the region of Thangeda on the opposite bank of the Kṛṣṇā River, and wished Machireddi to reveal his image for the good of humankind during the *Kaliyuga*.[13] The ruler, accompanied by his priests, searched all the caves on the banks of river Kṛṣṇa, as ordained by Nṛsiṁha, but could not trace the location of the deity. Sad and depressed, he fell asleep in the forest. Again the deity appeared in his dream and ordained him to search in a designated area near an Aare tree (*Buahinia Spicata*) hidden behind the foliage in a cave. The ruler found the cave and the image of Nṛsiṁha in a seated posture, with the well-spread hood of the seven-headed snake, Śeṣa, over his head, fully adorned with *cakra* (discus), *śankha* (conch), and *gadā* (mace) and decorated with flowers and sacred leaves. Overjoyed, the ruler revealed the sacred spot to the general public and constructed a temple.

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[13] Based on the interview with the priest at Mattapalli. *Mattapalli Sthalapurāṇāmu*.

Another story associated with the temple maintains that, "Chennuri Giramma", one of the great-grand-ancestor of Chennuri Śrī Narasimha Rao, Chairman of the temple committee, was an ardent devotee of Mattapalli Nṛsiṁha. She lived during the period of the Muslim emperor Aurangzeb. When the Muslim forces tried to attack the temple, she prayed to Nṛsiṁha to chase away the danger. Nṛsiṁha then created countless bees, which attacked and drove away the Muslim soldiers. The Muslim attempt to secure this temple proved a pointless exercise. This story is recited at the temple as a part of the *sthalapurāṇā* (sacred history), but there is no known historic documentation to support this statement.

The main sanctuary of the temple is located within a cave and faces the west (Figure 2.19). As in the case of most Hindu temples in south India, photography was not permitted within the main shrine. However, I was able to view all the images and make the appropriate notes, as well as purchase a photograph of the central image from the temple authorities. The central shrine image is a self manifested form of Nṛsiṁha (Figure 2.20). In order to aid the devotees, the amorphous form of the rock has been decorated with the insignia of Viṣṇu, namely, a *cakra* (discus) on his right and a *śankha* (conch shell) on his left. Plated eyes and the traditional Vaiṣṇava mark, the *nāma*, have been added in the center to denote the facial features. A mustache indicating the hairy upper lip of a lion further gives form to the figure and identifies the image as Nṛsiṁha. Surrounding the deity is a gold frame along with garlands of flowers and the Aare leaves that are used in worship.

To the left of the manifested form is a black, stone image of Lakṣmī seated on a lotus (Figure 2.21). She is four armed and holds a *padma* (lotus) in her upper right and left hands. Her lower right hand is in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear gesture) and the lower left hand is in *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gesture. In front of the presiding deity at a lower level are the *utsava* (festival) images of Nṛsiṁha and Lakṣmī as well as copper images of Sudarśana (the anthropomorphic form of Viṣṇu's *cakra*), and Nammazhwar, one of the most important of the twelve Vaiṣṇava saints. The superstructure on top of the main shrine is fairly simple, with no figural decorations (Figure 2. 22).

The main shrine in the cave has two natural openings on the west and the north. Two hallways were later added to house the subsidiary deities of the temple. The entrance door on the west is embossed with ten panels, two in each horizontal row (Figure 2.23). In the two panels of the top row are the insignia of Viṣṇu, the *cakra* and the *śankha*, and in the panels of the bottom row are two lions. In the center are six images of the various forms of Nṛsiṁha (Figure 2.24). All the images are four armed, with the upper two hands holding the *cakra* (discus) and the *śankha* (conch shell). The left panel in the second row shows Nṛsiṁha seated in a *padmāsana* (lotus posture), with his primary hands resting on his knees. This posture identifies Nṛsiṁha as the *Paramātma* (Universal Self), the primary cause of creation,

sustenance and dissolution of the universe.[14] The right panel depicts Nṛsiṁha emerging from a pillar at the moment of his incarnation. In the third row, on the left, the deity is on a lotus throne with the goddess Lakṣmī seated on his left thigh. The right panel illustrates Nṛsiṁha killing the demon Hiranyakaśipu, the cause of his incarnation. The left panel of the fourth row represents Yogānṛsiṁha. Here Nṛsiṁha is seated, with his legs crossed at the ankles and bound by a *yogapatta* (a band of cloth used in yoga). The main hands of the deity are resting on the knees, at the elbows. On the right is Nṛsiṁha offering his blessings to Prahlāda, son of the demon Hiranyakaśipu. Over the lintel is an image of Gajalakṣmī seated on a lotus with two elephants on either side (Figure 2.25). The jambs are decorated with floral motifs and there are two door guardians at the bottom.

The north door to the main shrine is decorated with ten panels embossed in bronze (Figure 2.26). Eight of these show the eight forms of Lakṣmī, which are collectively known as the Aṣṭalakṣmī (Figure 2.27).[15] The images are arranged in four horizontal rows of two panels. All eight forms are seated on a lotus with the primary right and left hands in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear gesture) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures, respectively.

At the top left is a two-armed form of Ādilakṣmī, the Primordial form. Next to her is Dhanalakṣmī, symbol of prosperity, holding a lotus in each of

[14] Siddheswar Jena, trans. and notes, *Śrinarasimhapurāṇ,* pp. 1-13.

[11] Some the forms of Aṣṭalakṣmi have more than one name attributed to them. For lists of the secondary names see Rao, *Pratima-Kosha*, pp. 47-51.

her top right and left hands. The lower left hand rests on a pot of coins representing wealth. In the second row, on the left, is Santānalakṣmī, goddess of progeny. She is identified by a *kalaśa* (vase) in her upper right and left hands and a child seated on her left lap. On the right is Dhanyalakṣmī, goddess of grains. She holds sugarcane stalks in her top hands. In her second set of hands she holds a sheaf of paddy on her right, and a branch of bananas on her left. In her third right and left hands are two lotuses. The third row, on the left, shows an image of Gajalakṣmī with her two upper hands holding a lotus in each. She is flanked by two celestial elephants pouring water over her head. Next to her is Vijayalakṣmī, goddess of victory. In her top left and right hands are the insignia of Viṣṇu, the *cakra* (discus) and the *śankha* (conch shell). In the second set of hands are a sword on the right and a shield on the left. The images in the fourth row show Mahālakṣmī on the left holding a lotus in her two upper hands, and on the right is Vīralakṣmī, goddess of valor. Her top hands hold the insignia of Viṣṇu, the *cakra* (discus) and the *śankha* (conch shell). In her second set of hands, she holds a *triśula* (trident) on her right and a spear on her left. The third set of hands hold a *pāsa* (noose) on her right, and a *kapāla* (skull-cup) on her left. According the *Aṣṭalakṣmī stotra*, the virtues of the Goddess Lakṣmī such as wealth, health, long life (identified by progeny), righteousness, victory, valor, abundance, and prosperity are channeled into eight powers known as Aṣṭalakṣmī.[16]

[12] Śrīnivasa Varadacharya, ed., *Astalaksmi stotram* (Madras: Venkataramaṇa Printers).

The bottom panels of the door are carved with two elephants (Figure 2.28). The sides are decorated with rich foliage topped by a *kalaśa* (vase) on either side. On the lintel are the Telugu words *Vaikuṇṭadwāramu*, meaning the doorway to Vaikuṇṭa, or paradisal Viṣṇu's abode.

The north *mandapa* (hallway) contains three shrines along its east wall. The first shrine is dedicated to the twelve Tamil poets-saints or Ālvārs (Figure 2.29). Each figure is marked on the forehead with a *nāma* (mark of Viṣṇu) and dressed in a red garment. In the second shrine are the founders of the Vaikhānasa sect of Vaiṣṇava practices (Figure 2.30). Seated on a pedestal in the center is a black stone image of the sage Vikhānasa. He is surrounded by a metal aureole and dressed in gold-colored garments. On either side of the central image are the figures of the four disciples: Atri and Bhrgu on the right, and Marici and Kasyapa on the left.

Next is a shrine dedicated to Goda devi, the only female poet among the Ālvārs. The figure is made of black stone and identified by a side knot on the left side of her headdress. Her right hand hangs down, while she carries a lotus and a parakeet in her left hand (Figure 2.31). The image is currently decorated in silk garments, jewelry, and garlands of flowers. Next to her, on the right, is a metal image that is used during festivals (Figure 2.32).

Facing the main shrine and located beneath the ground level is an enclosure with stone carvings of Hanumān and Garuḍa. The relief of Hanumān is encased in a metal covering (Figure 2.33). The deity is shown standing with his hands in *anjali mudrā* (salutation gesture). At his feet are

a pair of metal *pādukās* (slippers), and resting on the wall at his side is a mace. The figure of Garuḍa is painted and stands in profile against a bright blue background, with his hands in *anjali mudrā* (salutation gesture) (Figure 2.34).

A gateway leads directly to the main shrine (Figure 2.35). There is a *dhvajastambha* (flagstaff) in the front. The main *gopura* (entranceway) is three-tiered and located on the east side at a considerable distance away from the main shrine (Figure 2.36). The Kṛṣṇa River is approached by steps on the south side of the temple (Figure 2.37).

Vedadri

Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple is situated in the village of Vedadri in the Jaggayyapeta Taluq of Kṛṣṇa District (Figure 2.38). The site is called *Pancanṛsiṁha Kṣetram* (literally meaning the "sacred place of five Nṛsiṁha"). The five forms of Nṛsiṁha are: Jvāla Nṛsiṁha (emitting flames of fire); Śalagrāma Nṛsiṁha (a sacred black stone pervaded by the presence of Nṛsiṁha)[17]; Vīra Nṛsiṁha (powerful); Yogānṛsiṁha (yogic posture); and Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha (Nṛsiṁha with his consort Lakṣmī).

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[17] A black stone which contains a fossil ammonite and is chiefly found near the village situated on the banks of the Gandaki River and regarded as sacred by the Vaisnavas. The name Śalagrāma comes from the Sal trees (Vatica Robusta) growing in the region. For a description of all the Śalagrāma forms of Viṣṇu, see Rao, *Pratima-Kosha,* pp. 47-51.

According to the *sthalapurāṇā* (sacred history) of the temple, Vedadri signifies Vedas in the form of a Hill.[18] Once, a demon called Somakāśura stole the Vedas from the hands of Brahma, the custodian of the Vedas, and hid them the sea. The gods, in a state of panic, prayed to Viṣṇu to come to their rescue. Hearing the supplications of the gods, Viṣṇu took the form of Matsya (fish), entered the sea and killed the demon. In order to protect the Vedas from the cruel hands of the demons, Vishnu converted the Vedas with his divine power into a hill on the banks of the Kṛṣṇa River, and took the form of Jvāla Nṛsiṁha on top of the hill. Later, Brahma installed the form of Śalagrāma Nṛsiṁha in order to protect the world. Several hundred years later, a sage by the name of Rsyasṛnga installed the images of Yogānṛsiṁha with Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha on its pedestal in a temple facing the Kṛṣṇa River.[19] At the request of Garuḍa and other devotees, Nṛsiṁha manifested himself as Vīra Nṛsiṁha on the hill of Garuḍachala, 11 km to the northeast of Vedadri.

The temple of Vedadri consists of a group of shrines situated around a central chamber (Figure 2.39). The temple site can be entered from the street through a four-storied *gopura* (gateway), located behind the central shrine on the east side (Figure 2.40). Pillared porches flank the south and east sides of the temple with an entrance on the south side (Figure 2.41). A tall *dhvajastambha*, encased at its base, is located in front of the temple on the west side (Figure 2.42). The walls of the temple and the superstructures

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[18] *Vedadri Mahākṣetramu Sthalapurāṇāmu.*

[19] Ramakrishna Kavi, *Śrī Vedachala Mahatyamu.*

above the shrines are brightly painted and decorated with tiles depicting the various gods of the Hindu pantheon (Figures 2.43).

Although I was not allowed to photograph the interior, I was able to view the various shrines and their images. The interior contains a central hall with shrines along its east and north walls (Figure 4.44). In the east shrine is the image of Yogānṛsiṁha with Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha on its pedestal. The black-stone image of Nṛsiṁha is four armed with his upper two hands holding the principal attributes the *cakra* or the discus and the *śankha* or the conch shell, while the lower two hands rest on his knees (Figure 2.45). The legs are crossed at the knees and held by a *yogapatta*. In the center of the base of the main figure is a small image of Nṛsiṁha seated with his consort Lakṣmī (Figure 2.46). He is four-armed, with his upper two hands holding the principal attributes, the *cakra* (discus) and the *śankha* (conch shell). The primary hands are in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures. Lakṣmī is two-armed and carries a *padma* (lotus) in her left hand. In the north shrine is Nṛsiṁha seated in a yogic posture. The chamber to the right and left of the east shrine contains sculptures of the Vikhānasa saints and the goddess Lakṣmī respectively. Images of the twelve Ālvār saints are placed along the north wall of the central room.

On a hill next to the main temple structure and facing east is a self-arisen rock formation of Jvāla Nṛsiṁha (Figure 2.47). The surface of the natural rock outcropping has been marked with a *nāma*, that is, the forehead

mark of Viṣṇu. In front of the rock is a small shrine dedicated to the monkey god Hanumān (Figure 2.48). The image is standing with his hands in *anjali mudrā* (salutation gesture). In the waters of the Kṛṣṇā River at the foot of the main temple is a rock shrine dedicated to the Śalagrāma form of Nṛsiṁha (Figure 2.49).

Ketavaram

The temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha is located at the village of Ketavaram in Sattena Palli Taluq of Guntur District (Figure 2.50). As established in the *sthalapurāṇā* (sacred history), the temple was constructed by Raja Vasireddy Venkatadri Naidu, who also granted the village of Ketavaram to the temple in 1792.[20] Once, during the reign of the king Venkatadri Naidu, a tribal chief was frequently caught thieving in order to support his people. Despite repeated warnings from the king to change his ways the tribal chief continued his wrong doings. In order to punish the chief, Venkatadri Naidu invited chief to his home under false pretences and chopped off his hands. As a result of harming a guest under his roof, he incurred the wrath of the gods and was told by his priests to take a bath in all the holy rivers of India in order to absolve his sins. While Venkatadri Naidu was traveling through the country, Nṛsiṁha appeared in his dreams and asked him to build a temple in his honor in the location where the Kṛṣṇa River flows in a northward

[20] Interviewed the priest Jogacharyulu for the sacred history; However, inscriptions from the surrounding areas suggest that Nrsiṁha was already in worship in this area since the 16th century. See bibliography on inscriptions.

direction. Venkatadri Naidu journeyed along the river and came to the spot where the waters of the Kṛṣṇa flowed north. Finding the self-manifested form of Nṛsiṁha on a nearby hilltop, he then constructed a temple as a tribute to Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha on the banks of the Kṛṣṇa River.

The present temple structure was reconstructed in 1992 by a board of trustees (Figure 2.51). The temple can be approached through a simple two-storied gateway (Figure 2.52). A long porch flanks the doorway on either side with images of Hanumān (Figure 2.53) and Garuḍa (Figure 2.54) carved on its pillars. On either side of the entrance are relief carvings of *dvarapālās* or door guardians (Figure 2.55).

The temple consists of a central shrine, preceded by an antechamber and a small porch (Figure 2.56). The main deity, Nṛsiṁha, is four-armed, with his upper two hands holding the principal attributes, the *cakra,* (discus), and the *śankha,* (conch shell). The primary hands are in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures. The goddess Lakṣmī, seated on Nṛsiṁha's left thigh, is two armed and carries a *padma* (lotus) in her left hand. In front of the porch is a large, brightly painted relief carving of Hanumān (Figure 2.57). The temple faces west with steps leading down to the Kṛṣṇa River (Figure 2.58).

<u>Mangalagiri</u>

The temples of Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy and Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy are located in the Mangalagiri Taluq of the Guntur District in Andhra

Pradesh (Figure 2.59). There are two separate temples dedicated to the deity, one at the top of the hill and the other at the foot of the hill (Figures 2.60 & 2.61). According to inscriptions at the site, the structures were built over a period of time from the 12^{th} to the 18^{th} centuries.[21] The name Mangalagiri, literally meaning "auspicious hill," is believed to exist during all four *yugas* under various names: Anjanādri in *Kṛtayugam*; Thotādri in *Tretāyugam*, Mangāladri and Mukthyādri in *Dvāparayugam* and Mangalagiri in *Kaliyugam*.[22] The shape of the mountain itself resembles the form of an elephant.

There are several interesting legends that are attached to the two Nṛsiṁha temples at Mangalagiri and Mangalagiri.[23] One involves Pariyatra, an ancient king who had a son Hrasva Srungi, who was born with a number of bodily deformations. Realizing that his father was displeased with his deformities, Hrasva Srungi left his home on a pilgrimage and finally settled at Mangalagiri, where he performed penance for three years. At the end of the period, he was advised by the gods to stay on at Mangalagiri and continue his penance in the praise of Viṣṇu. The king, Pariyatra, came in search of his son in order to take him back to his kingdom. But, Hrasva Srungi refused his

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[21] See above p. 29.

[22] *Yuga* is an age of the world. The duration of each *yuga* is said to be 1,728,000; 1,296,000; 864,000; and 432,000. The four *yugas* together comprise 4,320,000 years of mankind. The descending length of the *yugas* represents a corresponding physical and moral deterioration in the people who live during each age.

[23] *Mangalagiri Kṣetra Mahatyam.*

father's command, took the shape of an elephant, and transformed himself into a mountain to become the abode of Viṣṇu.

As also stated in the *sthalapurāṇā*, a demon named Namuci performed severe penance and obtained a boon from Brahma that he would not be killed by anything that is either wet or dry. Armed with the power of the boon, he began to harass Indra, the king of gods. Indra and his retinue requested the help of Viṣṇu to fight the demon, and, thus, commenced destroying the armies of Namuci. In order to overcome the onslaught, Namuci hid in a cave. Realizing the demon's boon, Indra dipped the *cakra* (discus), Śudarṣana, of Viṣṇu in the foam of the ocean and sent it into the cave. Then, Viṣṇu manifested himself at the centre of the *cakra* as Nṛsiṁha and destroyed the demon with the fire of his exhalation. He was thus called Śudarṣana Nṛsiṁha. The gods themselves, unable to withstand the fire of Nṛsiṁha's anger, prayed to him for appeasement. Subsequently, Viṣṇu drank the *amṛta* (nectar) and cooled down, and then said that he would be satisfied with ghee in *Tretāyugam*, with milk in *Dvāparayugam*, and with pānakam (jagery water) in *Kaliyugam*. Because of the latter, the deity is called Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy.

Mangalagiri is also sacred due to its association with Rāma. According to the sacred history, it is believed that Lord Rāma while departing for Vaikunṭa after completing his *avatāra* (incarnation), advised Hanumān to stay at Mangalagiri as the *kṣetrapāla* (guardian).

The temple of Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy, dedicated to a *swayambhu* (self manifested) form of Nṛsiṁha, is located within a cave (Figure 2.62). A building was added in front of the cave to house the various services required by the devotees for worship (Figure 2.63). In front of the door is an image of kneeling Garuḍa, with his hands in *anjali mudrā* (salutation gesture) (Figure 2.64).

The main shrine image is a large gaping rock that has been encased in a gold-plated head with a wide open mouth (Figure 2.65). The head symbolizes the fierce aspect of Nṛsiṁha at the moment of the destruction of the demon Namuci. On either side are the primary attributes of Viṣṇu, the *cakra* (discus) and the *śankha* (conch shell). A superstructure was later added on top of the cave to mark the position of the main shrine (Figure 2.66).

A separate shrine to the goddess Lakṣmī is located above the cave temple (Figure 2.67). Next to the Lakṣmī shrine is a large relief sculpture of Hanumān that is carved into the rock and painted red.

The temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy, situated at the foot of the hill, traces its origins to the time of Yuddhiṣṭira, the oldest of the Pāndava brothers of the epic *Mahābhārata*. According to the local legend, Yuddhiṣṭira is claimed to be the founder of this temple.[24]

The temple faces east and can be entered through a tall towering gateway (Figure 2.68). The gateway has no figural decorations and was built

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[24] *Mangalagiri Kṣetra Mahatyam.* p. 8.

in 1807.[25] The south and north entranceways are fairly modern and were rebuilt in the 20th century (Figures 2.69 & 2.70). In the center of the south entrance is an image of Nṛsiṁha seated with Lakṣmī on his left lap flanked by *dvārapālas* (door guardians) at each level. The west gate has been left unfinished (Figure 2.71).

Judging by the brightly painted walls, it is clearly evident that the temple has been redecorated several times in recent years (Figure 2.72). The main temple can be entered through a brightly colored pillared hall with images of the door guardians on either side of the main door (Figure 2.73). I was not permitted to use my camera beyond this point. However, the temple authorities gave me the photographs of some of the interior sculptures and allowed me to make a drawing of the interior (Figure 2.74). In the antechamber preceding main shrine are housed the images of the Vaikhānasa and Ālvār saints.

In the main shrine, located at the back of the temple, is a black stone image of Nṛsiṁha with his consort Lakṣmī seated on his left thigh (Figure 2.75). Nṛsiṁha is four-armed with his upper two hands holding the principal attributes, the *cakra* (discus), and the *śankha* (conch shell). The primary hands are in *abhaya mudrā* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada mudrā* (boon bestowal) gestures. The facial features show wide, painted eyes with the prominent mark of Viṣṇu in the center of the forehead. The mouth is

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[25] See Inscriptions above p. 29.

wide open, with a protruding tongue. Lakṣmī is two-armed and carries a *padma* (lotus) in her left hand. The deities are seated on a gold plated pedestal, with a gold frame surrounding them.

A side door from the main hall leads to a separate temple to the goddess Lakṣmī, entered through a small porch, followed by an antechamber. The image of the goddess is made of black stone (Figure 2.3). She is four-armed, with the upper two hands holding a lotus. The lower right and left hands are in the *abhaya* (granting the absence of fear) and *varada* (boon bestowing) gestures.

Concluding remarks

Although the five Nṛsiṁha temples share some fundamental iconographic characteristics, their unifying factor is unclear from the forms of the temples temples. In each location, the *sthalapurāṇās* (sacred histories) created an establishment irrespective of whether it is miniscule or on a grand scale. Since the dates of construction and patronage of the temples are undoubtedly not the fusing elements, it is likely that other factors became the definers of these temples as a distinct assemblage. I propose that the location of the temples along the Kṛṣṇa River, and the shared religious theories and ritual practices at the temples appear to determine their identity as a group. It goes without saying that the genesis and

implementation of these unifying elements and their underlying conceptualization evolved over time.

<u>Principal Vaiṣṇava practices associated with the five temples</u>

The scriptures of the Hindus can be classified into Āgamā and Nigāmās (the four Vedas). The Āgamās prescribe the day-to-day ritualistic life and a practical course of self-discipline for its followers, as well as the procedures for consecrating idols in temples and elaborate ritual practices and festivals to a particular deity. The Āgamās have three main divisions: *Śaivāgama*, *Śaktāgama*, and *Vaiṣṇavāgama*, respectively with Śiva, Śakti, and Viṣṇu as the presiding deities.

The worship of Viṣṇu is primarily described in ritual texts known as *Vaiṣṇavāgama* that uphold Viṣṇu as the Supreme Reality along with Śrī or Lakṣmī. The primary role assigned to Viṣṇu in the Āgamās is one of helping suffering humanity.[26] The subject matter of the Āgamā is theoretically divisible into four categories: *jnāna* (higher knowledge) which gives access to final emancipation; *yoga* (he doctrine and practice of concentration; *kriya* (action, that is all activities associated with construction of temples and installation of images); *cārya* (the performance of daily worship and other rites, such as festivals).[27] The *Vaisnavāgamas* has two categories:

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[26] Dr. V. Varadhacharya, *Āgamās and South Indian Vaiṣṇavism* (Madras: Prof. M. Rangacharya Memorial Trust, 1982), p. 99.

[27] S. R. Bhatt, *The Philosophy of the Pāñcarātra (Avaitic Approach)* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1968), p. 7.

Vaikhānasa and Pāñcarātra. The fundamental difference between the two Vaisṇava traditions is that the practitioners are born into the Vaikhānasa sect, while the Pāñcarātras require intitiation.

1. Vaikhānasa

The Vaikhānasas are a small community of priests in most Viṣṇu temples of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. According to the Vaikhānasa tradition the sage Vikhānas, who was a manifestation of Brahma or Viṣṇu, composed the Vaikhānasa Kalpasutra and taught four disciples, namely, Atri, Bhṛgu, Kaśyapa, and Marīci, as well as the procedures of *samurtarcana*, that is devotional service to Viṣṇu in images. Collections of these instructions, written by the four disciples, constitute the core of Vaikhānasa texts.[28] These four names are considered to stand for traditions or schools handing down ritual doctrines and practices. Most Vaikhānasa literature is almost completely concerned with rituals, prescribing the formal procedures and rules of performance.

There are sixty Vaikhānasa texts that have been listed in various sources including the texts themselves.[29] Among these there are seventeen that are available either as a manuscript and or as printed material. In recent years, many authors have translated a few of the texts and written several commentaries on the origins and the ritual practices of the

[28] Varadhacharya, *Āgamās,* pp. 104-105.

[29] *Vimarsa*. (Delhi: Samskrita Kendriya Vidya Peetha).

Vaikhānasas. While the number of these sources is exhaustive, for the purposes of this dissertation I have used translations and commentaries provided by W. Caland, Teun Goudriaan, Jan Gonda, Varadachari and Gerard Colas.[30]

Claiming to be a school of the Vedic customs, Vaikhānasas have their own complete prescriptive manuals on temple practices exemplifying the *āgamā* literature.[31] These handbooks give a detailed description of daily worship to be performed by the temple priest. However, in later times, authorities, professing to belong to the tradition, sometimes wrote under their own names and sometimes under the names of one of the four seers. As a result, the sequence of the details of rituals were changed and systemized as new elements were introduced. These innovations are laid down in monographs and commentaries like the *Arcanakhanda*[32] and *Arcanasarasamgraha* (a commentary on the *Arcanakhanda*) that formed the basis for daily worship in Vaikhānasa temples performed to the present day.[33]

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[30] T. Goudriaan, "Vaikhanasa Daily Worship According to the Handbooks of Atri, Bhrgu, Kaśyapa and Marici," *Indo-Iranian Journal,* vol. 7, No.3 (1970); Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977); Teun Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom (Kaśyapa-Jnanakandah) A Ritual Handbook of the Vaikhānasas* (London: Mouton and Co., 1965); Varadhacharya, *Āgamās*; Gerard Colas, *Viṣṇu ses Images et ses Feux* (Paris: Presses De L'Ecole Francaise D' Extreme-Orient, 1992).

[31] The Vaikhānasas claim to be a Taittiriya branch of the Black *Yajur Veda*. Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature,* p. 141; Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom,* p. 7.

[32] *Arcanakhanda* is a monograph on daily worship belonging to the school of Kaśyapa. Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom,* p. 7.

[33] Goudriaan, "Vaikhanasa Daily Worship," p. 162; Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature*, p. 148.

The Vaikhānasas evolved the theory of the five aspects of Viṣṇu namely: Viṣṇu , the all-pervading supreme deity; Puruṣa, one who is the principle of life; Satya, the static aspect of the deity; Acyuta, one who is changeless; and Aniruddha, one who cannot be limited or reduced. According to the Vaikhānasa tradition, these manifestations are connected with the conception of the Vedic five-fold fire.[34] Among them, Viṣṇu is the most important and is called Ādimurti, as the one who pervades every being. The other four forms are characterized by the four qualities of Viṣṇu: "traditionality, wisdom, dominion, and equanimity".[35] Therefore, the four manifestations are inseparable from the Primordial Manifestation, Viṣṇu. These embodiments further stand for the four eras, the four stages of life, the four classes of society and the four Vedas. The Vaikhānasa texts emphasize the distinction between Viṣṇu as *niṣkala*, the pervasive unfigured presence in the universe, and his *sakala*, figured presence occasioned in the image. In accordance with Vaikhānasa doctrine of the two forms of Viṣṇu, two cult images are distinguished. There is the large immovable image representing Viṣṇu's *niṣkala* form, which is ritually placed in a sanctuary and elaborately consecrated, and a smaller movable image representing Viṣṇu's *sakala* form.

One of the characteristic viewpoints of the Vaikhānasas is that the pathway to salvation is not devotion alone, but also the worship of images. The Vaikhānasa doctrine states that mokṣa is release into Viṣṇu's heaven.

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[34] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom*, p. 230.

[35] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom*, p. 231.

The nature of a man's mokṣa is dependent on a devotee's service of *japa*, attentive repetition of prayer or mantra of Viṣṇu; *huta*, performance of sacrificial rites to the fire; *arcana*, offering worship to Viṣṇu images; and *dhyāna*, contemplation of Viṣṇu through yogic meditation. Of these four methods, *arcana* (worship of images) is considered to be the means of realizing all aims.

After purification and meditation to identify with Viṣṇu, the devotee surrenders to Viṣṇu and places the movable image on a bathing pedestal and elaborately bathes it. This is preparation for receiving the presence of God by immediate contact via a connecting string. The invocation starts with a *mantra*, saying that the Imperishable is linked to the Perishable and that the Self is released from all evil as it knows God. Flowers are presented to all the deities present. Then the hymn called the *Ātmasukta* is recited that identifies the body of the devotee with the cosmos.[36]

Although the Vaikhānasa texts seemingly describe practices that are parallel to the tantric tradition, as pointed out by some authors, there is at least one particular detail of worship that they have in common, namely, the assumed identification of the initiated devotee with the deity during worship.[37] The mental exercises here require precise recognition of the

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[36] The *Ātmasukta* is a collection of nine verses fro the *Vaikhanasamantraprasna* written in the *triṣṭubh* meter. The hymn is so-called because it begins with the word *atmatma* and concerns with transforming the individual into the cosmic spirit. S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Vaikhānasagama. Āgamā Kosha* vol. 3 (Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1990), p. 55. For the verses and their translation see Goudriaan, "Vaikhanasa Daily Worship, pp. 212-215.

centers of the subtle body, or *cakras,* and of the deities within them,[38] to enhance the awareness of the worshipper to cosmic dimensions so that his own constitution may accommodate the pervasive form of the deity. The devotee will then enter into a state of meditative absorption and become Viṣṇu himself.

The purpose of the ritual invocation of the supreme, transcendental Viṣṇu in the heart of the devotee or in an icon is to facilitate contemplation of the deity in one place. These parts of the ritual are to request Viṣṇu to take his *sakala* form in the movable image so that the devotee can converse with Him. Invoked by the proper *mantras* Viṣṇu makes his presence in the heart of the devotee. This results in the physical and mental integration of the priest with Viṣṇu and his spiritual union into the cosmos. The practitioner as Viṣṇu is then transferred into the image through ceremony and the image is made ready for worship by the laity

A *puja* ceremony takes place with Viṣṇu as the royal guest, followed by a *homa*, offering into the fire, and a *bali*, sacrificial offering with something that may be visible, touchable, audible, or eatable.[39] An offering of *havis*, cooked food, is important as the God's meal. The offering area is cleaned and a *bali* (sacrifice) of cooked rice sprinkled with butter is offered to Viṣṇu and He is meditated upon as the personal manifestation of the sacrifice. Finally

[37] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom*, p. 68.

[38] Varadhacharya, *Āgamās*, pp. 97-108; Colas, *Viṣṇu ses Images*, pp. 188-236.

[39] Varadhacharya, *Āgamās*, p.125.

puṣpānjali, a handful of flowers, are offered to the image and the temple doors are closed.

Inscriptions from perhaps the eighth century CE identify the Vaikhānasas as not merely ritual priests, but also as trustees charged with administering the temples and their lands.[40] Over time, the Vaikhānasas transformed themselves gradually into an orthodox sect of devout Viṣṇu worshippers, standing out against other groups, mainly the Pāñcarātras, by their maintenance of Vedic traditions.[41] With the rise of the Śrī Vaishnavas during the 10th-11th centuries, Vaikhānasas declined in their temple roles. However, they were not totally eclipsed in their duties and continue to perform worship in the Vaishnava temples. Moreover, the Nṛsiṁha temples at Vedadri, Mattapalli, Ketavaram and Mangalagiri are among some of the Viṣṇu temples that practice the Vaikhānasa rituals in the present-day.

2. Pāñcarātra

The beginnings of Pāñcarātra and even the original sense of the word remains a matter of uncertainty and scholarly dispute. The earliest reference to the Pāñcarātra occurs in the *Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa*[42] where Puruṣa Nārāyaṇā is mentioned as having conceived the idea of a *Pāñcarātrasattva*

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[40] R. Vasantha, "The Cholas and Introduction of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism into Karnataka," *QJMS*. 64 (1973), p. 32.

[41] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom*, p. 7.

[42] Albrecht Weber, ed., *Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa,* The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, n. 96 (Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series office, 1964), p. 997.

(continued sacrifice for five days) as a means of obtaining superiority over all beings and becoming all beings.[43] Literally, the term "Pāñcarātra" means "five nights". Based on an analysis of the definitions found in various texts,[44] the five *rātras* have been equated to a) five cosmic elements, b) five objects of senses, c) the five types of knowledge, or d) the five types of ignorance. The name Pāñcarātra also points to the five fold nature of Viṣṇu as *parā, vyūha, vibhāva, arca,* and *antaryāmin.*[45] Therefore, the Pāñcarātra *Sastra* can be considered either as the means for the liberation of the soul from the five elements, or container of the five types of knowledge, or the dispeller of the five types of ignorance.[46]

There are about two hundred and twenty five Pāñcarātra texts.[47] The number of Pāñcarātra texts and their dating has been a subject for controversy and debate among many authors.[48] A complete bibliography of

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[43] Śrī Vishwambhar Sharan Pathak, "The Early Vaiṣṇava Pantheon." *Journal of UP Historical Society,* pp. 24-25, 209-220; J. A. B. van Buitenen, "The Name Pāñcarātra". *History of Religions*, vol.1. no. 2. (1962), p. 292.

[44] Bhatt, *The Philosophy of the Pāñcarātra*; Gerhard Oberhammer and Marion Rastelli, eds., *Studies in Hinduism III*, *Pāñcarātra and Visistadvaita*. (Herstellung: Weitzer & Patner GmbH, Graz, 2002); Enkar Krishnamācharya, ed., *Jayakhyasamhita of Pāñcarātra Āgamā*. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1967); F. Otto Schrader, *Intoduction to the Pāñcarātra and Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1916), pp. 27-29.

[45] Schrader, *Intoduction to the Pāñcarātra*, p. 29.

[46] J. A. B. van Buitenen, "The Name Pāñcarātra," pp. 291-299.

[48] Bhatt, *The Philosophy of the Pāñcarātra*; Gerhard Oberhammer and Marion Rastelli, ed., *Studies in Hinduism III,*; Krishnāmacharya, ed., *Jayakhyasamhita*; Schrader, *Intoduction to the Pāñcarātra*; Sanjukta Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra. A Pāñcarātra Text* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000).

the Pāñcarātra Āgamās was prepared by H. Daniel Smith.[49] This contains a condensed description of the various printed Pāñcarātra texts. Several of these texts survive in manuscript form, while some are only in fragments, and others have not been found or recovered. Parts of these treatises are named after the sages who received the revelations, some after the disciples who dispersed the teachings, and some after an aspect of the deity. These are traditionally considered to be non-Vedic and Tantric in nature and have been stamped as inferior, non-Brahmanical, and, therefore, unacceptable by the priestly class.[50] However, my research indicates that the origins of the Pāñcarātra are rooted in the Vedas and are an authority on instructions and practices.[51]

The philosophy of the Pāñcarātra is based on the belief of *ekāntika*, one ultimate end. It affirms Viṣṇu as the supreme reality, with all his divine aspects as pre-existent, without beginning and infinite.[52] Prominent in the Pāñcarātra Texts is the concept of the four *vyuhas*, or emanations; each emanation, except the first, originates from an anterior emanation. Vāsudeva, identified with Viṣṇu, is the supreme deity, who is pure bliss and

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[49] Daniel H. Smith, *The Smith Agama Collection: Sanskrit Books and Manuscripts Relating to Pāñcarātra Studies* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1978).

[50] Bhatt, *The Philosophy of the Pāñcarātra*, pp.11-13.

[51] J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans.,*Yamunā's Āgamā Pramanyam or Treatise on the Validity of the Pāñcarātra*. by. Madras: Ramanuja Research Society, 1971.

[52] P. Pratap Kumar, *The Goddess Laksmi, The Divine Consort in South Indian Vaisnava Tradition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), p. 23.

conciousness.[53] In his transcendental form he creates from himself the emanation, Saṁkarsana and *prakrti* (matter) at the beginning of time; from the association of Saṁkarsana and *prakrti* is produced Pradyumna and *manas* (mind); from these come Aniruddha and *ahamkāra* (individuation). Viṣṇu is further characterized by six *gunas* (qualities) namely: *jnāna* (knowledge); *aiśvarya* (sovereignty); *vīrya* (virility); *śakti* (power/potency); *bala* (force); and *tejas* (energy). The form of Vāsudeva contains all six qualities. The other three emanatory forms comprise of a pair of qualities each: Saṁkarsana (*jnāna* and *bala*); Pradyumna (*aiśvarya* and *vīrya*); Aniruddha (*śakti* and *tejas*).

Further, according to the Pāñcarātra theology Viṣṇu exists in five different forms. They are *parā* or highest self, *vyūha* or emanation, *vibhāva* or incarnation, *antaryāmin* or the inner self of the devotee and *arca* or material image. In all five forms Viṣṇu, as the Supreme Being is associated with a creative power *śakti*, a dynamic principle who is figuratively known as Lakṣmī. According to the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, one of the central texts of the Pāñcarātra, the goddess Lakṣmī is not only Viṣṇu's consort but also his inherent *śakti* who dwells eternally within him, the two are inseparable, and, it is she who is the immediate cause of creation. At the beginning of every *yuga* (world age) the *śakti* of Viṣṇu awakens, opening her eyes as *kriya* (action) and *bhūti* (becoming). As *kriyaśakti*, Lakṣmī is identical with

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[53] Schrader, *Intoduction to the Pāñcarātra*, pp.40-44; Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra*, pp. 19-26.

Viṣṇu's *cakra,* Sudarṣana. As *bhūtiśakti*, she is the material cause of the universe.[54]

This knowledge depends on an understanding of the Pāñcarātra teachings that require the assistance of a qualified teacher. Initiation into the Pāñcarātra sects consists of *pancasamskara* (five ceremonies) such as: *Tapa*, branding the initiate's shoulders with the attributes of Viṣṇu ; *Pundra,* instruction in the application of the cosmetic sectarian mark on the forehead; *Nāman*, assigning a new name to the initiate; *Mantra,* receiving a secret *mantra* and explaining its sense; *Yāga*, teaching the details of external ritual. In addition, the adept learns internal yogic practices that are performed in the heart. Service to Viṣṇu combines with a life of purity to the end of realizing devotional unity with the deity.

At the core of the Pāñcarātra theology is the driving insistence that salvation comes only through knowledge of ultimate truth, a knowledge that is revealed through *bhakti,* or single-minded devotion. The recognition of Pāñcarātra Texts in temple rituals is closely related to the rise of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas and in the poets and singers who for centuries traveled up and down the subcontinent to kindle *bhakti,* or devotion, to Viṣṇu in the hearts of their compatriots.[55] Etymologically, the term *bhakti* is derived from the root

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[54] Schrader, *Intoduction to the Pāñcarātra*, p. 35.

[55] Susmita Pande, *Medieval Bhakti Movement* (Meerut: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1994), ix-xxxiii; S. M. S. Chari, *Philosophy and Theistic Mysticism of the Ālvars* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), pp. 126-130.

bhaj, which means *śeva* or meditation. In common practice, it is characterized as the divine-human relationship as seen from the human side.

While *bhakti* is used in a broad sense to cover an attitude of reverence to any deity or, honored being, such as a human teacher, the *bhaktimārga* is understood to be a path of exclusive commitment to a divine or human figure, personifying ultimate reality. In practice, the boundaries of the *bhaktimārga* (path of devotion) are indistinct; its forms are many and diverse, defined by various sectarian communities. All these communities were subject to one type of interpretation that concentrated on the intuitive knowledge of the deities and ascribed omnipotence to a particular deity. The godhead was personally envisioned and promoted single minded devotion to the Supreme Being.

The major forms of *bhakti* are described by not only the various moods of the devotee, but also by a special relation to a particular form of the deity such as servant to master; child to parent; and beloved to lover. When passionate attachment to a god is emphasized, *bhakti* offers a striking contrast to *yoga* and other ascetic paths that stress detachment and overcoming of all passions. The *bhakti* movement was long opposed by the Brahmins because it disregarded Vedic rituals, ignored caste, and stressed devotion over knowledge. The movements stand consistently in between the more austere paths and common Hindu religiosity. By drawing personal worth not from one's conventional social status, but solely the depth of one's devotion, it not only provided a spiritual path that was open to everyone, but

also a way that subverted the established social order. Though *bhakti* has an emotional element, it is intellectual insofar as it presupposes some knowledge of the Absolute.

The development of *bhakti* was particularly emphasized in the poetry of the celebrated Vaiṣṇava saints of south India, known as Ālvārs, who not only proclaimed an important movement of religious fervor but also prepared the ground for a great philosophical system.[56] For the Ālvārs, devotion was neither the crowning achievement of yoga nor the foremost practice aiding the attainment of self-realization. Rather, it was *bhakti* defined as an expression of sentiment in promoting human-divine relationship. The term "Ālvār" means one who is immersed in the experience of god. There were twelve Ālvārs in total, including among them, a woman named Āṇḍāl.[57]

Between the 5th- 9th centuries, the Ālvārs composed devotional hymns to Viṣṇu, known as *Nalaraya Divyaprabandham*, as an expression of their of their love. The main doctrines expounded in the hymns are: Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa associated with Lakṣmī is *parātattva* (ultimate reality); *bhakti* (devotion) or *prapatti* (self-surrender) is the means to attain *mokṣa* (final release); *kainkarya* (service) to god and godly-men is an important duty of a true Vaiṣṇava; *mokṣa* (final release) is the supreme goal.[58] The focus of the hymns was to reveal Viṣṇu's glory through the miraculous deeds of his

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[56] Vidhya Dehejia, *Slaves of the Lord. The Path of Tamil Saints,* (New Delhi: Minshiram Manoharlal, 1988); Chari. *Philosophy and Theistic Mysticism of the Ālvars*, p. 3

[57] Chari. *Philosophy and Theistic Mysticism of the Alvars*, pp.126-130.

[58] Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 20.

various incarnations. Unlike the Pāñcarātra Āgamās, the Ālvārs believed that all five forms of Viṣṇu were essentially one and could be represented in an image. The significance of the hymns addressed to the image established the presence of Viṣṇu in material form and impressed upon the laity that worshipping images was the easiest means of attaining liberation.

The most reliable source on the Ālvārs is a corpus of their own poetry compiled in the 10th century by Nathamuni, one of foremost theorist of Śrī Vaiṣṇava philosophy. The Śrī Vaiṣṇava movement led by Brahmins produced a hagiography by institutionalizing the saints and their poetry.[59] The compilation and preservation of the poems along with the promotion of the Pāñcarātra Āgamās were two of the crowning achievements of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.

The most significant contribution to the development and the propagation of the Vaiṣṇava religion was made by Rāmanuja (1017-1139).[60] Rāmanuja's philosophical views, together with a manual for daily worship based on the Pāñcarātra tradition, were directed by his personal faith. His position, as not only the *acārya* (teacher) of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community but also the general manager of the Śrī Rangam temple in Tamil Nadu, gave him unrivalled influence in many Vaiṣṇava centers of South India. His major contribution lay in the difficult task of formulating details of daily worship in

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[59] Chari. *Philosophy and Theistic Mysticism of the Ālvars*, p. 232.

[60] C.J. Bartley, *The Theology of Ramanuja* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 1-8; John Braisted Carmen, *The Theology of Ramanuja, an Essay in Interreligious Understanding* (London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 24.

temples and their efficient administration. The concept of *bhakti* (devotion) expressed through the Tamil hymns of the Ālvārs became the pivot of Rāmanuja's religion.

The increased participation of worshippers from all social levels, with the establishment of the more liberal Pāñcarātra tradition, spread from Śrī Rangam to other Vaiṣṇava centers, and is one of Rāmanuja's main legacies to the Vaiṣṇava faith as a whole. This is clearly evident in the traditions of the famous temple at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. More intentionally linked to Vedic ceremony, the Vaikhānasas priests maintained certain conservatism, especially resisting the incorporation of devotional hymns and the worship of Ālvārs and *acāryas* (teachers). However, owing to the influence of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, and in particular Rāmanuja, the images of the Ālvārs, as well as the introduction of the Tamil devotional hymns became evident at Tirupati and other Vaiṣṇava temples in south India.[61] My study shows that the Nṛsiṁha temples at Mattapalli, Vedadri, Ketavaram, and Mangalagiri abide by the Vaikhānasa practices. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the shrines to the Ālvārs, and the worship of the Vaikhānasa *acāryas* (teachers), suggest an infusion of the *bhakti* movement as propaganda to the Pāñcarātra philosophies.

At the same time the temple of Vadapalli follows Pāñcarātra practices. However, according to an inscription at the temple datable to 1619 C.E.

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[61] Sadhu Subrahmanya Sastry, *Inscriptions of Saluva Narasimha's Time: From 1445 A.D. to 1504 A.D.* (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 1998), p. 101

> "….Parasarabhattar Komara Venkatabhattara charyula ayyavaru paid a visit to the temple of Śrī Narasimha at Vadapalli and accepted the tirtha and prasada from the temple as it was a mahasthala on the bank of river Krishna and ordained that all the practices in the temple should be performed in the same manner as in Śrī Rangam and Tirupati."[62]

Thereby, suggesting an inclusion of the Vaikhānasa doctrines.

As in the case of most Viṣṇu temples, the five Nṛsiṁha in this study, temples played a key role in enhancing the development of regional traditions in Andhra Pradesh. In general, the method of performing worship at the five Nṛsiṁha temples can be characterized as a real influx of new traditions, together with changes in the system.

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[62] See above p. 29.



Figure 2.1. Five Nṛsiṁha Temples. Andhra Pradesh, India.
Drawing by John C. Huntington.



Figure 2.2. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh



Figure 2.3. Lakṣmī. Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.4. Hanumān. Detail of head. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.5. Vadapalli, Miryalagudem Taluq, Nalgonda District, Andhra Pradesh. Drawing by John C. Huntington.

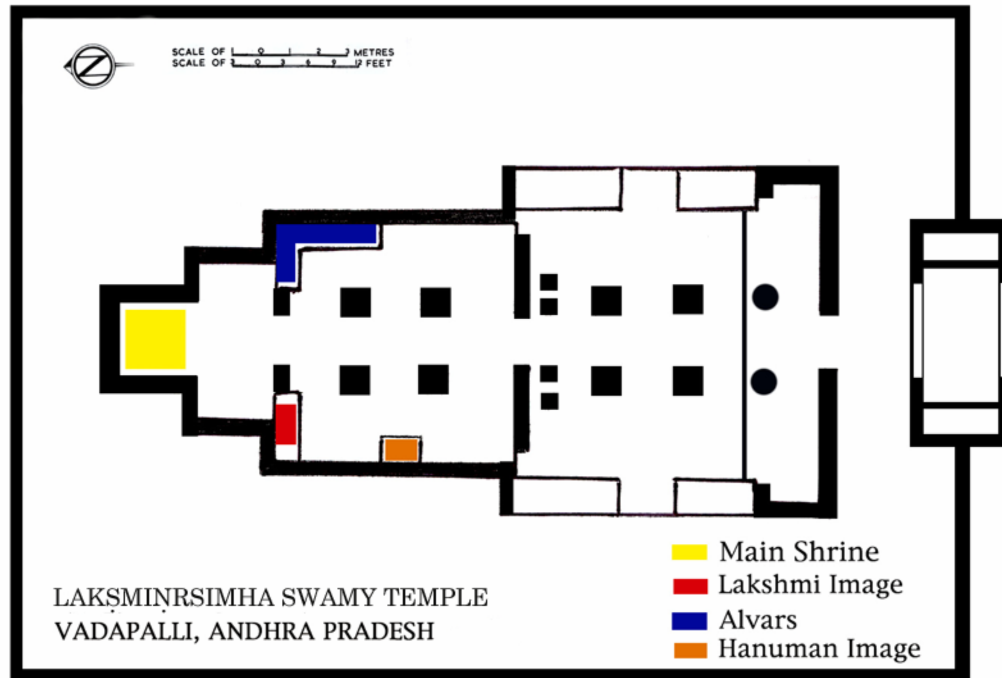


Figure 2.6. Plan. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.7. Garuda shrine and main entrance.
Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.8. Garuda. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.9. Enclosed porch. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.10. Dvārapāla. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.11. Mandapa. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.12. Lakṣmī. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.13. Ālvārs. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.14. Hanumān. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.15. Nṛsiṁha with Lakṣmī and Bhu (Earth Goddess). Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.16. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha.
Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.17. Path to Kṛṣṇa River. Temple of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha.
Vadapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.18. Mattapalli. Huzurnagar Taloq, Nalgonda District, Andhra Pradesh. Drawing by John C. Huntington.

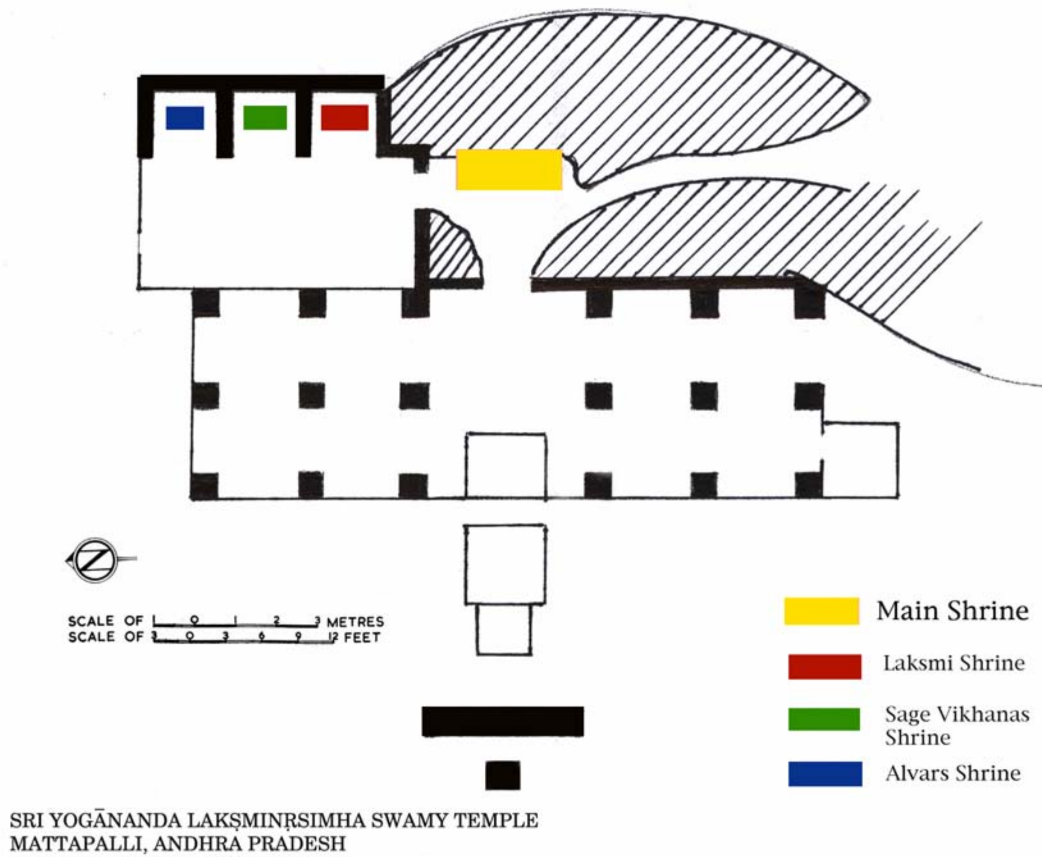


Figure 2.19. Plan. Śri Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.20. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy.
Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.21. Lakṣmī. Main shrine. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.22. Super structure above the main shrine.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.23. Main shrine, west doors.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.24. Main shrine, west doors. Detail of central panels. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.25. Main shrine, west doors. Detail of Lakṣmī.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli,
Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.26. Main shrine. north doors.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.27. Main shrine. north doors. Detail of Lakṣmī panels. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.28. Main shrine north doors. Detail of lower panels.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.29. Ālvārs. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.30. Vikhānasa with disciples: Atri, Bhrgu, Marici and Kaśyapa.
Śrī Yogānanda LakṣmīnṛsiṁhaSwamy Temple.
Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.31. Goda Devi. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.32. Goda devi. (festival image). Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.33. Hanumān. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.34. Garuḍa. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Swamy Temple.
Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.35. Gateway to the main temple.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.36. Main (east) gopura. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.37. Steps to Kṛṣṇa River. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.38. Vedadri. Jaggayyapeta Taluq, Kṛṣṇa District, Andhra Pradesh. Drawing by John C. Huntington.



Figure 2.39. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.40. Main (east) gopura. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.41. South pillars and entrance. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.42. Dvajastambha. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.43. Main shrine. exterior. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.

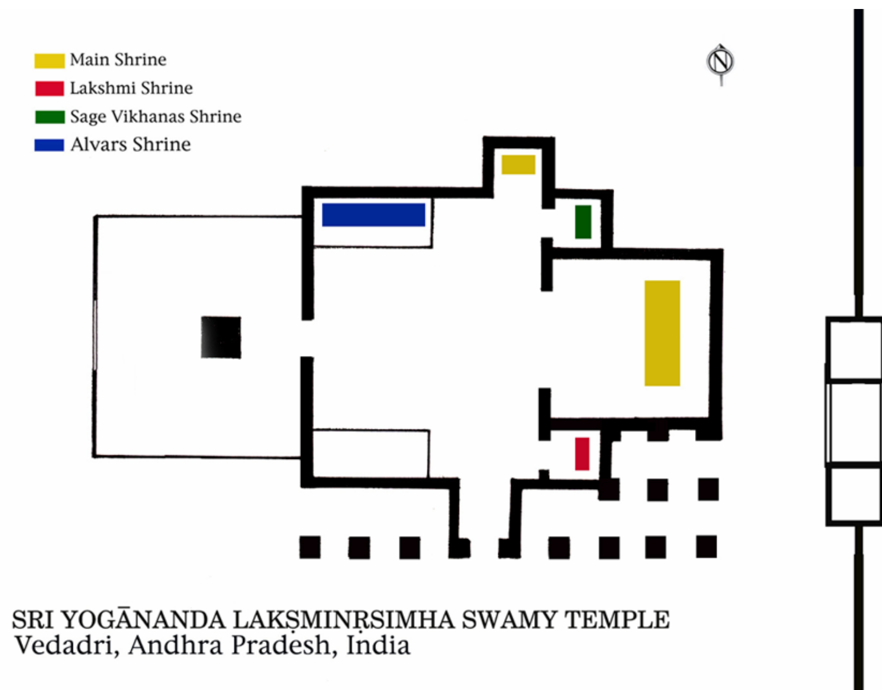


Figure 2.44. Plan. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.45. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Main Shrine, Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.46. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha.
Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Main Shrine, Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.47. Jvāla Nṛsiṁha. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.48. Hanumān. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.49. Śālagrāma Nṛsiṁha. Śrī Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.50. Ketavaram. Sattena Palli Taluq, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. Drawing by John C. Huntington.



Figure 2.51. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple. 1992. Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.52. Entranceway. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple. Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.53. Hanumān. entranceway. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple. Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.54. Garuḍa. entranceway. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple. Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.55. Dvārapāla. entranceway. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple.
Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.

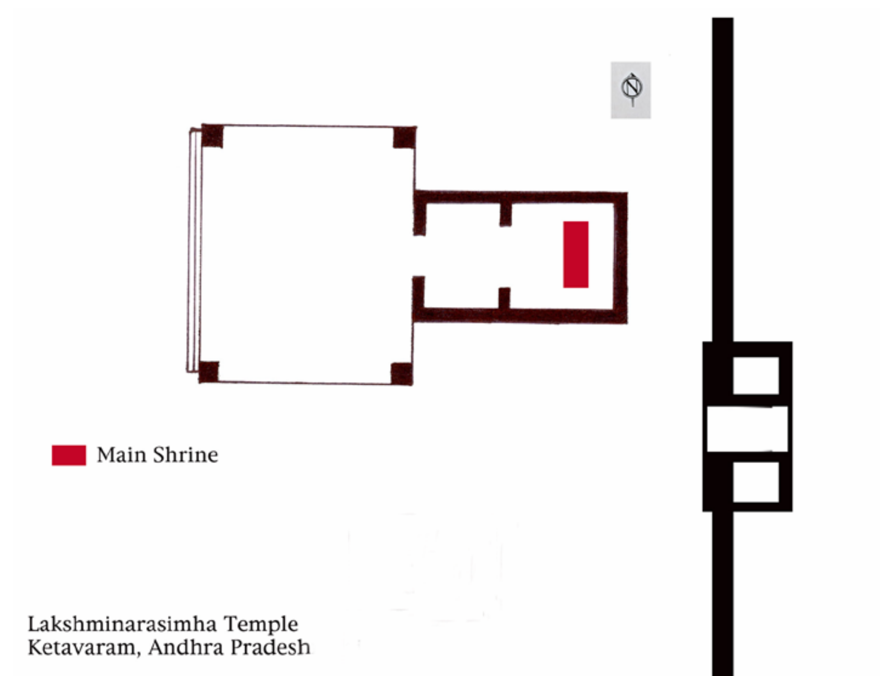


Figure 2.56. Plan. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple.
Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.57. Hanumān. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple.
Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.58. Steps to Kṛṣṇa River. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple.
Ketavaram, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.59. Mangalagiri, Mangalagiri Taluq, Guntur District Andhra Pradesh. Drawing by John C. Huntington.



Figure 2.60. Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.61. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.

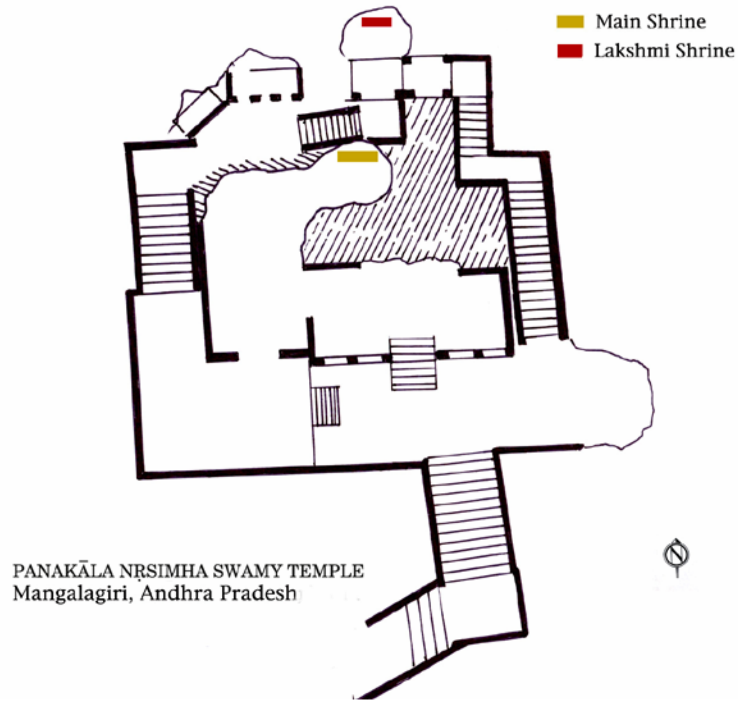


Figure 2.62. Plan. Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.63. Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy Temple. Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.64. Garuḍa. Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.65. Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy. Main shrine.
Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.66. Super structure on the main shrine.
Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.67. Lakṣmī shrine. Pānakālanṛsiṁha Swamy Temple.
Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.68. Main (east) Gopura. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.69. North Gopura. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.70. South Gopura. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.71. West Gopura. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.72. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 2.73. Mandapa. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.

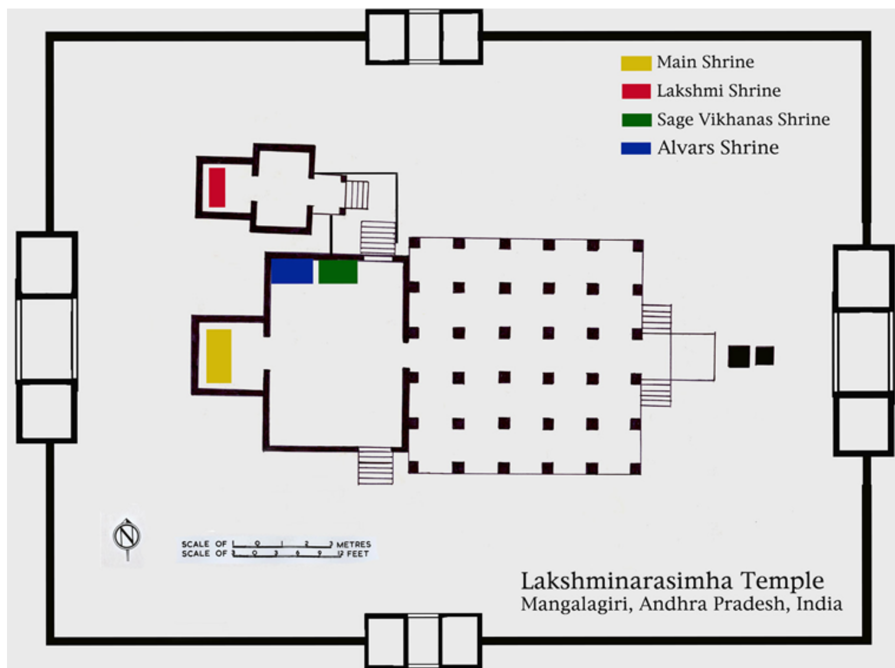


Figure 2.74. Plan. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.

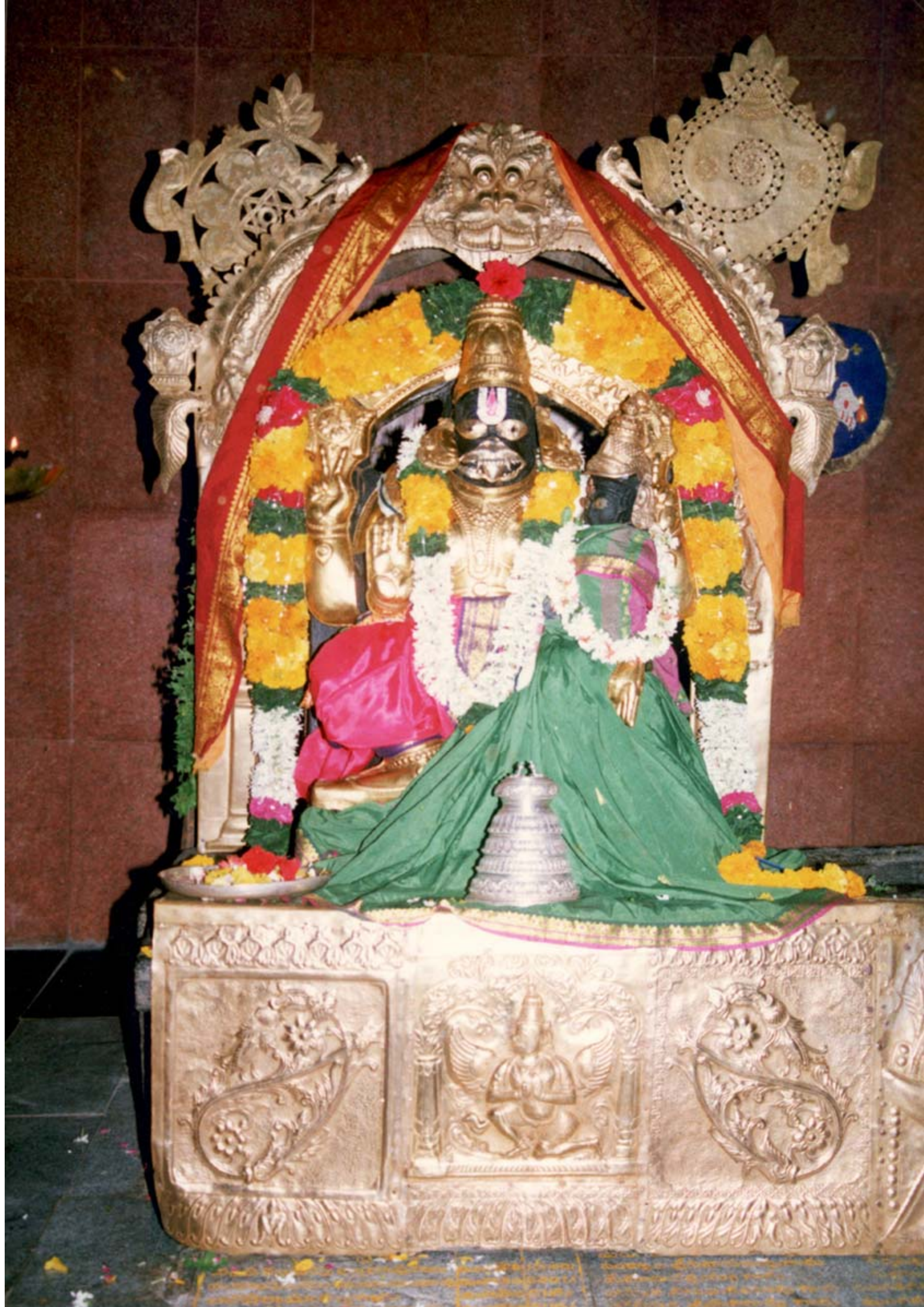


Figure 2.75. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Main shrine. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Swamy Temple, Mangalagiri, Andhra Pradesh.

CHAPTER 3

KEY ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS RELATING TO NṚSIṀHA

Among the countless deities in the Hindu pantheon, Viṣṇu is unique in that he manifests in a variety of *avatāras* (incarnations). The embodiments of Viṣṇu are numerous in his role as the protector, necessitated by the unceasing conflicts between the gods and the demons, good and evil. Viṣṇu is born each time for a specific purpose. When *dharma* is not adhered to, Viṣṇu appears on earth in one of his *avatāras* (incarnations) to destroy the evil-doers and to set right the wrong done by them.

> Whenever there is decline of *dharma* and ascendance of *adharma*,
> Then, Oh scion of the Bharata race! I manifest myself in a body.
>
> For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil, and for the establishment of *dharma,* I am born from age to age.[1]

[1] Swami Tapasyananda, trans., *Śrimad-Bhagavad-Gita* (Madras: Śri Ramakrishna Math, 1986), pp. 119-120.

The most commonly known and recognized incarnations of Viṣṇu are ten in number, declared to have been assumed on ten different occasions by him. The list of ten has some variation from tradition to tradition. In additition, the *avatāras* constantly varied in number and sometimes expanded to include, for example, more than ten in some Purāṇās to as many as twenty-six.[2] Accounts of the ten major incarnations are told in various legends throughout India.

The Narrative of Nṛsiṁha.

Nṛsiṁha is the fourth of the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu.[3] The narrative of Nṛsiṁha appears in varying lengths with minor differences in several Puranic sources, such as the *Harivamsa,*[4] *Viṣṇu Purāṇā,*[5] *Bhāgavata Purāṇā,*[6] *Nṛsiṁha Purāṇā*[7] and the *Padma-Purāṇā*,[8] to name a few.[9] The earliest complete explanation of the legend of Nṛsiṁha is found in the

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[2] For a complete list of the incarnations of Viṣṇu, see Vettam Mani, *Puranic Encyclopedia* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), pp. 78-83.

[3] Nṛsimha's position in the list of *avatar avatāras* depends on the individual Purāṇa.

[4] Vaidya, ed., *Harivamsa. Khila or Supplement to the Mahabharata.* vol.1, pp-286-289.

[5] H. H. Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa. A system of Hindu Mythology and Tradition.* vol.1 (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1989), pp. 190-222.

[6] Tagare, trans. and annotated, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* part 3, pp. 885-958.

[7] Siddheswar Jena, trans. and notes, *Śrinarasimhapurāṇ*, pp-296-343.

[8] Deshpande, transl and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa,*, 1988-1991.

[9] For details on all the sources of the narrative with comparisons, see Soifer, *Myths*, pp. 73-111.

Harivamsa, dating from the 4th century C.E. According to this source Viṣṇu took the form of a man-lion to overcome a demon-king known as Hiranyakaśipu. Hiranyakaśipu was the brother of Hiranyākṣa, who was killed by Viṣṇu in his previous incarnation as Varāha, the boar. In order to retaliate against Viṣṇu, Hiranyakaśipu performed severe austerities and received a boon from Brahmā that he might not meet with death by day or night, neither indoors or outdoors, by any weapon on earth or in the heavens, nor, in the hands of men, beasts, or gods.

With all his desires granted, the demon-king set about avenging his brother's death by terrorizing the gods and prohibiting the worship of Viṣṇu. After repeated prayers by the gods for the destruction of the demon, Viṣṇu assumed the form of Nṛsiṁha and tore out the entrails of Hiranyakaśipu with his sharp claws. Originally, Nṛsiṁha made his appearance to punish the demon-king for his arrogance and to save the world from his tyranny. Prahlāda, the devout son of the demon, played only an insignificant role in the legends. Later, the gradual change in the narrative between the various *Purāṇās* is furnished by the increasing role of Prahlāda, who, while still a boy, became an ardent devotee of Viṣṇu.

The relationship between Prahlāda and Viṣṇu as the devotee and savior and the centrality of Prahlāda is particularly reinforced in the *Padma, Bhāgavata*, and *Viṣṇu Purāṇās*, all of which aptly title the legend of Nṛsiṁha

as *Prahlādacarita* (Tale of Prahlāda).[10] Prahlāda, the ideal devotee of Viṣṇu, serves as a mouthpiece for long discourses on devotion to Viṣṇu. According to the *Padma-Purāṇā*, Prahlāda was a Brahmaṇa in his previous life, and, though born as the son of Hiranyakaśipu, maintained his dedication to Viṣṇu.[11]

When Prahlāda was five years old, he was entrusted to the care of two teachers, Canda and Amarka, sons of the sage Sukrācarya. Strict instructions were given to these teachers to impart all demonic traits to the child and banish Viṣṇu's name from his mind. The teachers taught him about *artha* (wealth), and *kāma* (desire), but abstained from teaching about the other two goals of human life, *dharma* (righteousness), and *mokṣa* (liberation). But, in spite of their best efforts, the instructors could not create a single negative thought in Prahlāda's mind. He persisted in his own belief that Visnu was the supreme master of the world to be worshipped by nine modes of devotion beginning with listening to the glories of the God and culminating in total surrender of the self.[12] Hiranyakaśipu failed to curb his son's devotion in spite of his persecutionary measures, and ordered the youth to be killed. However, Prahlāda, totally devoid of physical consciousness, was always in a state of bliss by chanting the name of Viṣṇu. He survived all tortures inflicted upon him and came out unscathed. Finally, in utter

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[10]Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, p. 190.

[11] Deshpande, trans. and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa,* p. 2900-01.

[12] Tagare, trans. and annotated, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* part 3, p. 912.

exasperation, Hiranyakaśipu challenged the omnipotence of Visnu by his mocking query and kicked the pillar in the palace verandah. The pillar split into two and Viṣṇu emerged from it in the form of Nṛsiṁha. Nṛsiṁha seized Hiranyakaśipu by the throat, and placing him on his lap, tore out the demon's entrails with his nails. Thus, the demon-king was killed by Viṣṇu, on the verandah, which is neither indoors nor outdoors, at sunset, which is neither day nor night, as half-man and half-lion, which is neither man nor beast.

According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇā* and the *Padma-Purāṇā*, the terrible wrath of Nṛsiṁha did not diminish even after vanquishing the demon. The gods, headed by Brahmā and Rudra, were unable to appease his anger. In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇā*, even his consort Lakṣmī was afraid to go near him.[13] Then, at the request of Brahma, Prahlāda propitiated Viṣṇu and touched his feet with his head in deep devotion. At the tender touch of Prahlāda, Nṛsiṁha grew calm and his anger gave way to kindness. Vishnu gave his blessings to Prahlāda, his true devotee, and vanished on the spot. On the other hand, according to the *Padma-Purāṇā* the gods turned their minds towards Lakṣmī, offered their prayers in devotion and requested her to approach Nṛsiṁha on

[13] Tagare, trans. and annotated, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* part 3, p. 941.

their behalf.[14] Seeing his consort Lakṣmī, Nṛsiṁha became tranquil and seated her on his left lap. Then Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, and the hosts of gods acclaimed Prahlāda as the king of demons, blessed him with various boons and returned to their respective abodes.

Images of Nṛsiṁha.

Nrsimha has been variously portrayed in both sculpture and painting throughout India. An analysis of the different forms enunciated in the iconographical texts indicates that the images center primarily on certain characteristic features. They are:

1. Nṛsiṁha emerging from the pillar to vanquish the demon-king Hiranyakaśipu (Figures 3.1, 3.2).
2. A standing or seated Nṛsiṁha without any attendants (Figures 3.3, 3.4).
3. Nṛsiṁha seated in a yogic or meditational posture (Figures 3.5, 3.6).
4. Nṛsiṁha accompanied by one or two of his consorts (Figure 3.7).

Although the images fall into one or other of these categories, it is important to note that there are several titles and descriptions given to each type, and no two iconographic sources agree with the other. In this dissertation, I have used the *Elements of Hindu Iconography* by T. A.

[14] Deshpande, trans. and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa,*, p. 3207.

Gopinatha Rao[15] and the *Pratima Kosha* by S. K. Ramachandra Rao[16] to explain the different types of images. The studies made by these two authors are based on sources such as the *Śilparatna*, *ViṣṇudharmottaraPurāṇā, Amśumadbhadāgama* and the *Karaṇāgama.* However, there are very few citations provided by either author, and therefore, I have been unable to verify the information they provide myself.

Stauna Nṛsiṁha

One of the most popular forms of Nṛsiṁha is the depiction of the deity killing the demon-king Hiranyakaśipu (Figure 3.1). In this type, Nṛsiṁha may be portrayed with four or more arms, with his two primary hands ripping out the demon's entrails.

A stone image from a pillar in the Undavalli Caves, Andhra Pradesh, India (Figure 3.1), illustrates the deity ripping out the insides of the demon Hiranyakaśipu. Nṛsiṁha is eight-armed, with his upper two hands holding a *cakra* (discus) and *śankha* (conch shell). His primary hands slaughter the demon with his claws. A second set of hands are holding the demon in his lap. The deity stands with his left leg bent, while Hiranyakaśipu lies

[15] Rao. *Elements of Hindu Iconography.* vol. 1. part 1. pp. 145-161

[16] Rao, *Pratima-Kosha*, pp. 53, 288-9.

helplessly on his bent knee. A protruding tongue and sharp fangs suggest the god's fury.

The wrath of Nṛsiṁha and the death of Hiranyakaśipu are clearly depicted in a modern calendar print from India (Figure 3.2). Nṛsiṁha is seated with the demon Hiranyakaśipu sprawled across his knees. The deity is ten-armed, with his primary hands shown in the process of disemboweling the demon-king. In the two upper right and left hands are the *cakra* (discus) and *śankha* (conch shell). The second set of hands hold a *padma* (lotus) on the right and a *gadā* (mace) on the left. In the third right and left hands are a *bāṇa* (bow) and an arrow. Finally, in the last pair of hands are a shield on the right and a *khadga* (sword) on the left. The snake Śeṣa forms a halo around Nṛsiṁha's head. The figure of Prahlāda stands to the deity's right with a garland in his raised hands.

The *stauna* (standing) form is sometimes illustrated as Nṛsiṁha emerging out of a stone pillar. This form of Nṛsiṁha is also known as *stambha* (pillar) Nṛsiṁha (Figure 2.24, right half of the door, second panel from the top).

Kevala Nṛsiṁha

The term *kevala,* meaning single or alone, shows Nṛsiṁha either standing or seated and holding one or more of his attributes. A sculpture from the Pratap Singh Museum in Śrīnagar, Kashmir, depicts the deity in a squatting position with his two hands resting on a mace (Figure 3.3). A *vanamāla* (garland of forest flowers), one of the typical characteristics of Viṣṇu, hangs over his shoulders. A second example from a modern temple in Shahkund, Bihar, illustrates a four-armed form of Nṛsiṁha holding a *māla* (beaded necklace) and a *śankha* (conch shell) in his primary right and left hands (Figure 3.4). The two secondary hands are lowered to rest on a *gadā* (mace) and a *cakra* (discus). A large halo surrounds the deity's head.

Yoga Nṛsiṁha

Nṛsiṁha may also be depicted seated in a posture of yogic contemplation, as seen in the central shrine images from two of the nine temples in Ahobilam, Andhra Pradesh (Figures 3.5 and 3.6). The first shows Nṛsiṁha seated in a *padmāsana* (lotus posture) (Figure 3.5). The deity is four-armed with his upper hands holding a *cakra* (discus) on the right and a *śankha* (conch shell) on the left. The primary right hand is in *abhaya mudrā*

(granting the absence of fear) and the left hand rests on his left thigh. The sculpture is made of black stone, smeared considerably with *kumkuma* (the red powder used in worship). The second image is a relief representing Nṛsiṁha with four arms, the upper hands holding a *cakra* (discus) and a *śankha* (Figure 3.6). However, in this case, the deity's primary hands rest at the elbows on his raised knees. The legs are crossed at the ankles and held up by a *yogapatta* (a band of cloth used in yoga).

After the death of the demon Hiranyakaśipu, Nṛsiṁha is said to have taught Prahlāda the secret of yogic contemplation.[17] This statement is attested in the *Padma-Purāṇā* where Nṛsiṁha relates the process of worshipping his form.[18] Moreover, in the same Purāṇā, Prahlāda tells his father, Hiranyakaśipu, that he was taught the knowledge of yoga by Viṣṇu himself, and proceeds to extol the virtues of Viṣṇu, saying that, "…Nārayaṇa is the highest Brahman, Nārayaṇa is the highest truth, Nārayaṇa is the highest meditator and the highest meditation."[19] Thus, fixing his mind and heart with perfect mental concentration and composure, Prahlāda praised Nṛsiṁha after the death of his father:

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[17] Ramesh, *"108 Vaisnavite Divya Desam,"* vol. 6, p. 9.

[18] Deshpande, trans. and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa*, p. 2900-2906.

[19] Deshpande, trans. and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa*, p. 3200.

"Oh Lord! You are verily none else but this universe consisting of cause and effect…Having with this universe within yourself by your own agency…With your eyes closed in Yogic meditation which transcends sleep by your self-illumination, you stay in the fourth state which lies beyond the three states of wakefulness, dream and deep sleep."[20]

In the *Nṛsiṁha Purāṇām*, Mahadeva extolled the deity Viṣṇu as,

"The Lord incarnated as man-lion, (Nṛsiṁha), the most formidable (Mahābhīma), one having teeth as strong as the thunderbolt (Vajradamṣtra), the Lion (Nakhayudha) the prime God (Ādideva), the creator of the universe (Jagatkaṛtr), the master of yoga (Yogeśa), the Garuḍa-bannered god (Garuḍadvaja)."[21]

Reference to the meditational nature of Nṛsiṁha also appears in the *Kurma Purāṇā* where Viṣṇu assumed the man-lion form through the power of yoga.[22] Similarly, in the *Viṣṇupurāṇām*, Prahlāda became one with Viṣṇu through the force of his contemplation (*yogaprabhāvat*) and, Viṣṇu appeared in front of Prahlāda, clad in the yellow robes of a yogin.[23] According to the *Viṣṇusahasranāma stotram*, controlling all the senses along with the mind,

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[20] Tagare, trans. and annotated, *The Bhāgavata Purāṇ,* part 3. p. 941.

[21] Siddheswar Jena, trans. and notes, *Śrinarasimhapurāṇ*, p. 302.

[22] Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, Trans. and annotated, *The Kurma Purāṇa* (Delhi:Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994).

[23] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, p. 219.

realization of oneness between the body and the *paramātma* (highest soul, Viṣṇu), is yoga.[24]

Nṛsiṁha with his consorts

Nṛsiṁha is frequently depicted with one or two of his consorts. In south India, Nṛsiṁha is typically shown with the goddesses Śrī (Lakṣmī) and Bhu (Figure 2.15).[25] However, in north India the deity is very often portrayed with Lakṣmī and Sarasvati as his primary consorts. A black stone image of Nrsimha from eastern India, now in the State Archaeological Museum of Bengal, shows the deity standing with Lakṣmī and Sarasvati (Figure 3.7). Nrsimha is standing with a *cakra* (discus) and *gada* (mace) in his upper right and left hands, while the lower hands hold a *śankha* (conch shell) and a *padma* (lotus). On the deity's right is the goddess Lakṣmī holding a *padma* (lotus) in her right hand, and on the left is the Goddess Sarasvati with a *vīna* (musical instrument).

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[24] Śri Sankara Bhagavatpada, *Śri Viṣṇusahasranāma Stotram* trans. P. Sankaranarayana (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1996), pp. 55-56.

[25] See Chapter 2, p. 36

When portrayed with a single consort the Nrsimha is always depicted with Lakṣmī (Figure 2.2).[26] This type of portrayal is known as Prasanna Nṛsiṁha because of the presence of Lakṣmī, who as the embodiment of compassion not only alleviates the fury of Nṛsiṁha but also renders him benign.

Role of Goddess Śrī Lakṣmī and her Relationship to Viṣṇu

Śrī, or Lakṣmī, is the primary consort of the deity Viṣṇu. Etymologically the term Śrī is derived from the root *śru* which means to listen. As such, Śrī is the goddess who listens (*śru srāvane)* to the pleas of her devotees and acts as a mediator (*puruśakara*) on their behalf.[27] She is also named Lakṣmī as she denotes *lajja* (modesty), serves as the *lakṣaṇa* (identification mark) of Viṣṇu, and exhibits her permanent presence on the chest of Viṣṇu as Śrīvatsa. The two names of the goddesses are frequently used together and sometimes interchangeably when associated with her consort Viṣṇu.[28] For example, Viṣṇu is known as Śrīpathi, Śrīnivasa, and

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[26] For description of Image see Chapter 2, p. 32; for significance see below pp. 138-139.

[27] *Lakṣmi Aṣtottaraśatanāmā.* p. 29-33; S. Chari, *Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 162.

[28] The two deities appear as distinct in the *Śri-Sukta* discussed below. While there is no satisfactory evidence of the period of time, it is reasonable to assume that the two forms were merged together as the consort of Viṣṇu, in view of their seemingly overlapping attributes and characteristics. This is clearly evident in the Purāṇa s and the Agamas, where Śri and Lakṣmī are treated as one and the same. Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, pp. 86-88

Śrīdhara, as the consort of Śrī, and Lakṣmīpati, Lakṣmīkanta, and Lakṣmīnatha when associated with Lakṣmī.[29] The *Puruṣa Sukta* of the *Ṛg Veda* describes Viṣṇu as a Supreme Being along with his consorts Lakṣmī (wealth) and Hri (modesty): "*hriṣca te lakṣmīṣca patnyau*".[30]

The origin of Lakṣmī is rooted in various narratives. The *Śatapata Brahmaṇa* is one of the earliest sources that ascribes Lakṣmī's roots to the austerities of Prajapati, who performs a *Dākṣāyana* sacrifice for the sole purpose of obtaining cattle, off-spring, and prosperity (Śrī): "*prajayā paśubhihi syām Śrīyam gacceyam*".[31]

The *pancalakṣana* texts of the Purāṇās relate several myths that illustrate the origins of Lakṣmī.[32] The *vamśānucarita* (genealogy of kings) of the lunar race in the *Brahmānda Purāṇā* states that after performing a *rājasūya* sacrifice, Soma, (Moon) gave the three worlds as a gift to his priests.[33] Nine divinities, including Lakṣmī, then came to attend upon him.

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[29] Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998), p. 1353-5, 1575-6.

[30] N.S. Sontakke, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā with commentary of Sayanacharya,* eds., C.G. Kasikar and others. vol. 4 (Poona: Vaidika Samsodhana Mandal), 1933-51.

[31] Weber, ed., *Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa*, p.173.

[32] According to R. C. Hazra, the Purāṇa s have been divided into five chief characteristics known as the *pancalaksana.* These five characteristics are *sarga* (creation), *pratisarga* (dissolution and recreation), *vamsa* (divine genealogies), *manvantara* (ages of the Manus), and *vamsanucarita* (genealogies of the kings). The five sections formed the basis of all Purāṇa s along with topics such as ritual ceremonies, glorification of holy places, legends of deities and epic heroes that were added through the course of time. R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), pp. 4-25.

Here, Lakṣmī is presented as a simple female divinity and there is no reference to either parentage or her association with Viṣṇu. However, a similar narration in the *Padma-Purāṇā* mentions that Lakṣmī came to attend on Soma after forsaking Nārayaṇa.[34]

In other versions of Lakṣmī's origins, she is the daughter of Daksa and was given as a bride to Dharma, along with twelve of her sisters;[35] In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, Khyāti, the thirteenth daughter of Dakṣa, married the sage Bhṛgu and gave birth to Lakṣmī, who was in turn married to Viṣṇu.[36] In the same Purāṇā, Rudra's body was half-man and half-woman. The female half of Rudra's body became Sati, the great goddess. Sati was further divided into two halves, the dark and the bright half. Out of the bright half were created several divinities, like Svāha, Svādha, Sarasvati, Lakṣmī, Medha, and Mahāvidhya, among others.[37]

A widely accepted account of Lakṣmī's origin is the legend of the churning of the ocean. According to the most detailed account in the *Viṣṇupurāṇām*,

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[33] Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare, Trans. and annotated, *The Brahmānda Purāṇa* (Delhi:Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994), p. 349.

[34] Deshpande, trans. and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa,*, pp. 543-544.

[35] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, pp. 74-79; Manmatha Nath Dutt, ed., *A Prose English Translation of Markandeya Purāṇa* (Translated literally into English Prose) (Calcutta: H.C. Dass, Elysium Press, 1897), pp.220-221.

[36] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, p.117.

[37] N.A. Deshpande, Trans and annotated, *The Vāyu Purāṇa,* part 9 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), p. 2900-2906.

> "Then, seated on a full-blown lotus, and holding a water-lily in her hand, the Goddess Śrī, radiant with beauty rose from the waters. The great sages, enraptured, hymned her with the *Śrī-Sukta* dedicated to her praise. Viśwasu and other heavenly [quiristers ?] sang, and Ghṛtachi and other celestial nymphs danced before her. Ganga and other holy streams attended for her ablutions; and the elephants of the skies, taking up their pure waters in vases of gold, poured them over the goddess, the queen of the universal world…Thus bathed, attired, and adorned, the goddess, in the view of the celestials, cast herself upon the breast of Hari."[38]

The earliest reference to the goddess as Śrī and as Lakṣmī occurs in the *Śrī-Sukta*, a hymn appended to the *Ṛg Veda*.[39] This is perhaps one of the earliest hymns to Śrī Lakṣmī, and it associates her with certain symbols and qualities that persist throughout her history in the Hindu tradition. As used in the Vedic hymns, Śrī Lakṣmī implies *anapagāmini* (firm and steady), *īsvarī* (powerful), and *saubhāgya* (prosperity). As an external quality, the goddess suggests *yastī* (beauty), *jvalantī* (luster), and *hiranmayī* (radiance of gold). An important feature of Śrī Lakṣmī in this hymn is her association with fertility and abundance, as *ārdhrā* (moist), *kardama* (mud) and *nityapuṣṭām karīṣiṇīm* (soil enriched by cow-dung). Consequently, Śrī Lakṣmī refers to all auspicious qualities in terms of physical health, material prosperity, and general well being. It is, therefore, not surprising that

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[38] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, p.109.

[39] N.S. Sontakke, C.G. Kasikar and others, eds., *Śri-Sukta. Khila of Ṛg Veda Samhitā with commentary of Sayanacharya,* vol. 4 (Poona: Vaidika Samsodhana Mandal, 1933-51).

Lakṣmī is widely propitiated in most rituals associated with consecration of temples, harvest, birth and marriage, and all practical enterprises.

The idea of Lakṣmī's manifested forms expressing prosperity gave rise to different aspects of her character, namely, Rajyalakṣmī (kingdom), Dhanalakṣmī (wealth), Santānalakṣmī (progeny), and Vīralakṣmī (valor), to name a few. The *Brahmavaivartapurāṇam* (700-800 C.E.) states that Mahalakṣmī assumed different forms due to her yogic power. In Vaikunṭa (abode of Viṣṇu), she appears as a *paripūrṇatamāparā* (complete, absolute state); in the heavens she is Svargalakṣmī or Sakrasampat svarupini (prosperity of Indra); on earth she is the Rajalakṣmī of kings; in the nether regions, she is Nāgalakṣmī of the *nāgas*; and, in homes she is the lady of the house as Gṛhalakṣmī.[40] Several of these forms of Lakṣmī have been described at length in the iconographic books used for this study.[41] In fact, some images of the goddess Lakṣmī described in Chapter 2 as Aṣṭalakṣmī relate to the very attributes explained above (Figure 2.27).[42]

Although a minor deity in the Vedas, by the time of the epics and later the Purāṇās, Śrī Lakṣmī assumed a complicated, multifaceted identity, and was considered a supreme goddess in her own right as well as the consort of Viṣṇu. References to her ascendancy were already evident in the *Śrī-Sukta*,

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[40] J. L. Shastri, ed., *Śrivyasamaharsiproktam Śribrahmavaivartapurāṇam, Brahmavaivartapurāṇa of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipayana Vyasa,* part 1. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass), p. 119.

[41] See Chapter 1, p. 22.

[42] See Chapter 2, pp. 42-43

where she is identified as Isvari, the supreme sovereign of the universe: "*Īśvarīm sarvabhūtānām tāmihopahvaye Śrīyam.*"[43] As Isvari, Lakṣmī enjoys the same status as Isvara (the lord of the universe, namely, Viṣṇu). As an Absolute, *paripūrṇatamāparā*, Śrī is regarded as *jaganmāta* (mother of the world), *anapāyinī* (imperishable), *nitya* (eternal), and like Viṣṇu, she is all-pervasive.[44] In the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, the goddess is constituted as having equal knowledge to the Ultimate Brahman: "The essence of I-hood is also knowledge, which is all-knowing and all-seeing. The absolute state of both myself and Brahman is identical with knowledge."[45] Thus, due to the unbroken association and the inseparable connection between them, the Brahman (Viṣṇu) and the goddess are regarded as identical.

The texts relating to the cults of Vaiṣṇavism at the five temples, the *Vaikhānasa* and the *Pāñcarātra Āgamās*, give special prominence to Śrī as the consort of Viṣṇu. In the *Kasyapa's Book of Wisdom* of the Vaikhānasas, Śrī, as the *prakṛti* (nature) and productive activity of the Supreme Being, being ever associated with Viṣṇu, projects the universe of spirit and matter.[46] Viṣṇu as the supreme *puruṣa* (man) and Śrī as *prakṛti* (nature) are represented in a personal individual form.

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[43] N.S. Sontakke, C.G. Kasikar and others, eds., *Śri-Sukta.*

[44] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, p. 86.

[45] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra*, p. 10.

[46] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom*, p. 117.

> "This goddess is proclaimed as Śrī, as *prakṛti* (nature), as creative power (*śakti*); all women are identical with her, and likewise all men (identical with the Primeval Man). Creation is based on these two (God and the Goddess); thus, one should worship them together only.[47]

Similarly, in the Pāñcarātra texts the dynamic aspect, or *śakti* of the Supreme Being, is Lakṣmī, who is the functional cause of all creation. She describes herself as,

> "…the eternal, independent Śakti of Nārayaṇa, the source of all achievement, the mysterious goddess, continuously engaged in creating."[48]

As a creative principle, the goddess does not depend on anything, is not limited to time or form. [49] Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu are said to be one, who do not differ in their meaning; they stand together between the *śakti* (power) and the *śaktimat* (one who is possessed of power) and, hence, one cannot be conceived without the other.

The interaction of Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu is clearly illustrated in the *Jayakhya Saṃhitā*:

> "*Sūyrasya raśamayo yadvat urmayośchamvudheriva*
> *Sarvaiśvarya prabhāvena kamalā śriīpathe tathā*
>
> Kamala (Lakṣmī) is inseparably connected with Śrīpathi (Viṣṇu) as the rays with the sun and the waves with the ocean."[50]

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[47] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom*, p. 119.

[48] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra*, p.65

[49] Ramanujacharya, ed., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā of Pāñcarātrāgama*.

[50] Krishnamacharya, ed., *Jayakhyasamhita*, p.47.

In the *Viṣṇupurāṇām,* Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu in their union are predisposed as one, in harmony and co-operation.

> "…Viṣṇu is meaning, she is speech; he understanding, she intellect;…He is the creator, she is creation…He is the Vedas, she is its chanting;…Keśava is the sun, the lotus seated goddess its radiance…The lord of Śrī is the moon, she is his unfading light; Lakṣmī is the light, Hari the lamp…"[51]

The Significance of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha

The goddess Lakṣmī is associated with Viṣṇu in all his manifestations.[52] Specifically, in whatever form Viṣṇu manifests himself in the physical universe, Lakṣmī too takes her birth to be his consort, appropriate to the role to be played by him. For example, when Viṣṇu was born as Paraśurām, Lakṣmī appeared as Dharaṇi; in the incarnation of Rāma, she emerged as Sīta; and, when Viṣṇu descended as Kṛṣṇa, she became Rukmiṇi. Likewise, when Viṣṇu took the form of Nṛsiṁha, Lakṣmī appears to placate his anger at the request of the gods.[53]

> "The man-lion was adorned with two raised hands holding a conch and a disc, and with the other two granting boons and freedom from fear. His chest was marked with Śrīvatsa and Kaustubha; he was adorned with a garland of wood flowers. He was also decorated with earrings resembling the rays of the rising sun. The man-lion, adorned with

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[51] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, pp.86-87.

[52] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam*, p.115.

[53] See above p. 123.

> ornaments like necklaces, armlets, bracelets, shone with Lakṣmī sitting on his left (lap) of his body."[54]

The relationship between Viṣṇu and his Śakti is a non-distinguishable absolute unity.

> "Brahman embraces both the principle of existence and its state of existence, hence It (Brahman) is the eternal state (*padam*). (When differentiated) the existing principle is God Nārayaṇa and its state of existence is the supreme Lakṣmī, i.e. myself. Therefore Brahman, the eternal is called Lakṣmī-Nārayaṇa because the I-entity is always inherent in the I-hood. The I-entity is always recognized as the source of I-hood; for the one cannot exist without the other and each is invariably linked to the other"[55]

In the central shrines at the Nṛsiṁha temples of Vadapalli, Ketavaram, Mangalagiri, and Vedadri in Andhra Pradesh, the main image is Nṛsiṁha with Lakṣmī seated on his left lap, as described above (Figures 2.2, 2.46 and 2.75). At the temple of Mattapalli is a single outcropping of a rock identified by the devotees as Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha (Figure 2.20). The importance of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha at the five temples under discussion is irrefutable. The Absolute Brahman (Nṛsiṁha) possesses the highest power and this power aspect is deified in the Goddess Lakṣmī. In other words, although Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (Nṛsiṁha and Lakṣmī) as two sentient beings are distinct deities, they are, nevertheless regarded as constituting one reality.

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[54] Deshpande, trans. and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa*, p. 3207.

[55] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra*, p. 9.



Figure 3.1. Stauna Nṛsiṁha.
Undavalli Caves, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 3.2. Stauna Nṛsiṁha. Calendar Print.



Figure 3.3. Kevala Nṛsiṁha,
Sri Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar.
Photograph by John C. Huntington.



Figure 3.4. Kevala Nṛsiṁha
Shahkund, Bihar.



Figure 3.5. Yoga Nṛsiṁha, Ahobilam, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 3.6 Yogā Nṛsiṁha, Ahobilam, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 3.7. Nṛsiṁha with Lakṣmī and Sarasvati
State Archaeological Museum of Bengal.
Photograph by John C. Huntington.

CHAPTER 4

THE KṚṢṆA RIVER AS AN ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENT OF THE FIVE NṚSIṀHA TEMPLES IN ANDHRA PRADESH

While there are hundreds of temples dedicated to Nṛsiṁha in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the five in this study are the only ones that are located along the Kṛṣṇā River. As such, I suggest that the river and the location of the temples along its banks are key elements in understanding the grouping of the five temples. In addition to the fact that the Kṛṣṇā River links the temples as it flows from the west to east across Andhra Pradesh, the ritual practices at the temples include daily observances that combine the temples into a grouping.

In many cultures of this world, water is seen as the creative power that symbolizes a life-giving and generative quality. Waters can symbolize the primal substance from which all forms come and to which they will return either by their own regression or in a cataclysm. They can manifest birth, growth, decay and are all encompassing. In India, the image of vivifying waters that envelop *sṛṣti* (creation), *sthiti* (maintenance and support), as well

as *pralaya* (destruction), only to give rise to a new creation, may be identified with fecundity and the Brahman itself.

In the Hindu cosmogonies, waters are often represented as *hiraṇyagarbha*, the container of the divine egg or seed of all creation. The waters are the very foundation of this universe. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*:

> "In the beginning, the waters and the ocean alone existed. The waters had a wish: How shall we procreate? They made an effort. They practiced ascetic heating, and so it happened that a golden egg appeared."[1]

The *Nāsadīya Sūkta* (The Hymn of Creation) of the *Ṛg Veda* describes the beginning as darkness. This darkness is the creator, the primordial principle, which is male, and refers to the waters locked up from within and incapable of birth. Birth takes place when the inherent fertility is freed and creation emanates. That creation is feminine and fecund. Thus, nothingness is transformed into meaningfulness by the interaction and combination of the two extremes, male and female.[2] As mentioned in the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, the waters reveal not only the cosmic *puruṣa* (male) but also the root of beings before creation, namely *prakṛti. Prakṛti* is Nature, the cosmic force with her infinite potency of transforming, nourishing, and bearing.[3]

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[1] Weber, ed., *Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa*, pp. 831-832.

[2] Vasudeva S. Agrawala, trans., *The Nāsadīya Sūkta*, Varanasi: Prithvi Prakasan, 1963.

[3] Arthur Avalon, trans., *Tantra of Great Liberation* (*Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*) (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), pp. 49-51.

In the *Ṛg Veda*, Viṣṇu is mentioned as the god of cosmic progression. In Viṣṇu's highest footstep springs the well of the water of wisdom and immortality. The god holds the waters, the earth, and everything else together in his three strides.[4] In their varied manifestations, the water gods and the waters themselves posses qualities or traits comparable to the Absolute. More explicitly, in Hinduism, it is in the form of the vast oceans and rivers that waters are generally considered to be gods and goddesses.

Although the rivers are alluded to as both male and female, most rivers are primarily considered to be female.[5] The river is an ancient and complex cultural symbol in Hinduism. India's rivers, seen as originating in heaven and flowing down on to the face of the earth, are generally venerated as goddesses. The earthly rivers are seen as an extension or expansion of the divine waters that flow from heaven to earth. The river, always being replenished by its tributary streams, is considered a symbol of eternal existence that cleanses away the transgressions of humanity. As described in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, all the rivers are sacred, all flow toward the sea. All are like mothers and all purge away imurities.[6] The *Ṛg Veda* describes the Indian sub-continent as *Saptasindhavah*, the land of the seven rivers that

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[4] Ralph T. H. Griffith, trans., *The Hymns of the Ṛg Veda* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 103.

[5] Griffith, trans., *Hymns of the Ṛg Veda,* p. 359.

[6] F. Eden Pargiter. trans., *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1969), p. 306.

were released by Indra in the beginning of time.[7] In the *Ṛg Vedic* cosmology, the beginning of the world or the development of making the worlds habitable is linked with the freeing of the heavenly waters by Indra. A demon by the name of Vṛtra is said to have withheld the waters, thereby hindering creation. After his defeat by Indra, the waters rushed on to the earth "like mother cows eager to suckle their young."[8] The rivers on this earth are therefore seen as having a heavenly origin and as being essential to fertilizing and nourishing the earth.

An important significance of rivers and running waters in general are their purifying qualities. For a Hindu, a ritual bath consisting of sprinkling water over one's head or a dip in the moving waters of a river or a stream is one of the simplest ways to rid oneself of impurities. As stated in the *Ṛg Veda,*

> "Waters which come from heaven, or those that wander dug from the earth, or flowing free by nature, bright, purifying, speeding to the ocean, here let those waters, goddesses protect me"[9]

The physical evidence of the continuous process of purification is the swiftness of the moving waters. For a Hindu, it is believed that chanting the names of the seven sacred rivers of India while taking a bath leads one to liberation.

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[7] Griffith, trans., *Hymns of the Ṛg Veda,* p. 542.

[8] Griffith, trans., *Hymns of the Ṛg Veda,* pp. 587-588.

[9] Griffith, trans., *Hymns of the Ṛg Veda,* p. 359.

"Gaṅgā ca Yamunā caiva Godāvarī Sarasvatī
Narmadā Sindhu Kāverī jale'smin sannidhiṃ kuru."[10]

Although all rivers are revered as removers of pollution, the Gangā is paramount among India's rivers as a purifying power. Hymns worshiping the Gangā repeatedly highlight the purifying power of the river. As one of the main rivers in north India, the Gangā is the source of health and wealth for its people.

According to the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* (700-800 C.E),

> "…She [Gangā] is the source of redemption…Heaps of sins, accumulated by a sinner [wrongdoer] during millions of births are destroyed by the mere contact of a wind charged with her vapor…As fire consumes fuel, so this stream consumes the sins [impurities] of the wicked…"[11]

In Hinduism, the most common name for a sacred place is called a *tirtha*, which literally means a place for crossing a river or a ford across a stream.[12] In the most general sense, a *tirtha* is a crossing place between realms, and, as such, a *tirtha* is conceptualized as an *axis-mundi*, the central pivot of the cosmos. As a sacred *tirtha*, the Gangā is a model for all the rivers of India. Her supernatural ability for salvation is shared by all the bodies of water in the land.[13] Appropriately, the rivers Godāvarī and Kṛṣṇā are often

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[10] Shastri, ed., *Śrivyasamaharsiproktam Śribrahmavaivartapurāṇam,* part.1, p. 41.

[11] Shastri, ed., *Śrivyasamaharsiproktam Śribrahmavaivartapurāṇam,* part 1, p. 74.

[12] S. M. Bharadwaj. *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage.* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1999), p. 2.

[13] Shastri, ed., *Śrivyasamaharsiproktam Śribrahmavaivartapurāṇam,* part 1, p. 207.

referred to as Dakṣina (south) Gangā and Patala (underground) Gangā respectively.[14]

The Kṛṣṇā River

One of the major rivers in Andhra Pradesh is the River Kṛṣṇā, which flows across the state from west to east (Figure 4.1). The river rises in the Western Ghats of the state of Maharashtra, and flows south and eastward through the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, where it enters the Bay of Bengal. In its course, the Kṛṣṇā is joined by as many as nineteen tributaries.[15] Literally, the river is termed Kṛṣṇā, meaning black, due to the black soil of the region.

Books written in both English and Telugu outline the origin, the legends, and the importance of holy places that are situated along the banks of the Kṛṣṇā River.[16] Of these, the Telugu works *Puṣkaraveṇi* and *Kṛṣṇā Puṣkara Sancika* give valuable information about the religious importance of

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[14] Narella Lakshmana Rao, *Kṛṣṇā Tīramlo Puṇyakṣetrālu* (Vijayavada: Gautam Publishers), p. 23; Acarya Divakarla Vekatavadhani, "Puranamuloni Nadimahatmyamu," in *Puṣkaraveṇi*, ed. S. B. Raghunadacharya (Tirupati: Tirupati, Tirumala Devasthanam, 1981).

[15] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Karachi-Kotayam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), p. 6, p. 334; M.V. Rajagopal, *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteer* (Hyderabad: The Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1978); Nalgonda District, 1978; Krishna District, 1977; Guntur District, 1977.

[16] For examples, see A. Ramachandran, *The Cultural History of Lower Krishna Valley: Its Contacts with Southeast Asia* (Jaipur: Publication Scheme, 1996); Raghunadacharya, ed., *Puṣkaraveṇi* ; V.V. Krishnasastri, ed., *Kṛṣṇā Puṣkara Sancika* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Prabhutvam, 1992); Narella Lakshmana Rao, *Kṛṣṇā Tīramlo Puṇyakṣetrālu* (Vijayavada: Gautam Publishers).

the Kṛṣṇā River in Andhra Pradesh. Another Telugu source, *Kṛṣṇā Tīramlo Puṇyakṣetrālu*, offers detailed accounts of all the holy places along the Kṛṣṇā River, as well as its surrounding areas. Although the Nṛsiṁha temples at Vadapalli, Mattapalli, Vedadri, and Mangalagiri have been mentioned in a few of these sources, their importance as a religious group has gone unnoticed.

The Kṛṣṇā River is an important component in the socio-economic development of the state of Andhra Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh is one of the largest states in India and is incredibly fertile, with many major and minor land routes and river systems that criss-cross the territory. From the early historic period trade routes, military routes, political routes, and religious routes abounded in the region. It is, however, impossible to demarcate the trade and communication routes before the historic ages except to say that, as elsewhere in India, their movements likely included routes along river beds and they probably utilized water transport whenever and wherever possible.

The *Āndhrabhāṣabhūṣaṇam*, a Telugu text from the 14th century, mentions that the present regions of Andhra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu were traversed by a network of trade routes that connected almost all the important cities and port towns of South India.[17] Trade was carried on

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[17] P. S. Kanakadurga, "Interstate Trade During the Kakatiya Period" *The Quarterly Journal of the Mystic Society*, 77(1986):17-31; P. Chenna Reddy, *Guilds in Mediaeval Āndhra Deśa* (Delhi: Sundeep Prakasan, 1991).

through highly organized merchant guilds, with bases from villages to capital cities and intermediary links in between.

Apart from land routes, there were a number of sea routes for foreign trade, and river routes to boost the internal trade, as well as social and religious contacts. The two local rivers of Andhra Pradesh, Godāvarī and Kṛṣṇā, played an important role in the transportation of merchandise. The levy of *revu-sunka* (wharf-toll) referred to in inscriptions from Ketavaram and datable to 1553 C.E., bears testimony to the fact that besides ordinary ferry operations, transportation of commercial goods was also carried on the rivers.[18] Along the banks of rivers and in close proximity to them, we can also trace the growth of settlements. The economic prosperity of the merchants was reflected in their lavish donations made to the temples in the form of shares on the sale and purchase of merchandise. Another inscription from Ketavaram, datable to 1547 C. E., mentions the donations of lands to the deity Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha.[19] All these routes provided a network of communication links promoting the economic, social, religious, and political life of the entire region of Andhra Pradesh (Figure 4.2).[20]

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[18] M. Rama Rao, comp. and ed., *Inscriptions of Andhradesa*, no. 854. vol. II. part I. (Tirupati: Sri Venkatesvara University, 1968), p. 311.

[19] Rao, comp. and ed., *Inscriptions of Andhradesa*, p. 311.

[20] Based on a drawing illustrated in S. J. Mangalam, *Historical Geography and Toponomy of Andhra Pradesh* (New Delhi: Sivadesh Prasad Singhal, 1986), p. 144.

The second factor that determines the five temples as a religious unity is the pilgrimage undertaken by the devotees to the five temples, and the rituals that are performed at these five temples. The daily worship, or *puja*, at each temple consists of several actions, such as bowing, touching the feet of the deity, offering of flowers and food, and *darṣan*, that is to see and be seen by the deity. In all types of Hindu pilgrimage, devotees seek to absorb the auspicious effects of contact with the deity through the reception of substances, such as food, water, and flowers that have been in close proximity to the Supreme Being. Benefit in the form of merit, good fortune, and wellbeing is also received from the sight of an image. These activities provide a means of engaging in intimate transactions with the divine. Just as the devotee looks at the divinity, so the deity looks back at the devotee in an exchange of vision. In fact, it is the power of the image in perceived visual exchange and acknowledgment that is the core of the pilgrims' motivation.[21]

In Hinduism, visiting holy places is one of the main religious duties of the practitioner. The act of undertaking a religious journey is enjoined as a sacred commission upon all devotees. Hindu pilgrimage is much more than an appreciative tour of the landscape: it is an experience in learning the implicit religious history of the land. According to scholars such as Diana Eck, the entire land of India from the Himalayas in the north to

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[21] The concept of *darsan,* and the visual exchange with a deity is the intrinsic goal of every Hindu that is ingrained into the very fabric of their daily life. See Diana Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1981).

Kanyakumari in the south is sacred to the Hindus.[22] Just as some pilgrims circumambulate a temple as an act of devotion, others circumambulate the whole of India as an act of pilgrimage.

In their daily ritual utterances, the priests at each of the temples list the five Nṛsiṁha temples as a group, and discuss the merits of worshipping at each. This reinforces the internal understanding by the devotee that the five temples act as a distinct set. Moreover, the priests, in their daily chants also extol the necessity of visiting the five temples and receiving *darsan* of the five deities and thereby living a life according to a sacred order.[23] This includes a sacred bath, worshipping a deity, offering alms, participating in appropriate religious rituals, and generally achieving identity with the Cosmic Reality.[24]

Kṛṣṇā River Identified as the Goddess Lakṣmī

The role of the Kṛṣṇā River within the framework of the five Nṛsiṁha temples has deeper implications than the socio-economic and the daily ritual observances performed by the lay pilgrim. Although the *Kṛṣṇā* was not mentioned as one of the seven major rivers of India in the Sanskrit Purāṇās, nevertheless, the river plays a prominent role in the lives of the Andhra

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[22] Eck, *Darsan* p. 48.

[23] Recording of the rituals at the five Nṛsiṁha temples.

[24] Bharadwaj, *Pilgrimage,* p. 149.

people. It has an ancient history of its own, entitled *Kṛṣṇā Mahatmya.*[25] In modern times there are several Telugu songs that glorify the flowing and churning waters of Kṛṣṇamma, or Mother Kṛṣṇā.[26]

A Telugu version of the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* (1300-1400 C.E) mentions the Kṛṣṇā River as one of the sacred rivers of India.

"Gaṅgā ca Yamunā caiva Kṛṣṇā Godāvarī Sarasvatī
Narmadā Sindhu Kāverī jale'smin sannidhiṃ kuru."[27]

Further, the Kṛṣṇā is one of the twelve important rivers that attain the high status of a *puṣkaram.*[28] The term *puṣkaram* literally means a twelve-year cycle. In the Hindu calendar, the deity Bṛhaspati (Jupiter), along with a host of gods, travels along the twelve signs of the zodiac, spending a year at each constellation, beginning with *meṣam* (Aries) and ending with *mīnam* (Pisces). Among all the rivers of India, there are twelve that are associated with each sign of the zodiac. They are: Gangā (*meṣam,* Aries); Narmadā (*vṛṣabham*, Taurus); Sarasvatī (*mithunam*, Gemini); Yamunā (*karkātakam*, Cancer); Godāvarī (*simham*, Leo); Kṛṣṇā (*kanyā*, Virgo); Kāverī (*tula*, Libra);

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[25] Mentioned in, Raghunadacharya, ed., *Puṣkaraveṇi* ; Krishnasastri, ed., *Kṛṣṇā Puṣkara Sancika*.; Lakshmana Rao, *Kṛṣṇā Tīramlo Puṇyakṣetrālu.*

[26] Tumurulu Laksminarayana, "Puṣkaram ante Emiti?" *PuṣkaraveṇI*, ed S. B. Raghunadacharya (Tirupati: Tirupati, Tirumala Devasthanam, 1981).

[27] Mentioned in, D. L. Acarya "Nadulu Dharmikabhavana" *Puṣkaraveṇi*. ed S. B. Raghunadacharya. (Tirupati: Tirupati, Tirumala Devasthanam, 1981); Telugu language emerged as a literary medium during the 11-14 centuries of Andhra Pradesh history and several of the Sanskrit epics and *Purāṇās,* including devotional hymns, teachings, and commentaries were translated into the Telugu medium. See above, Chapter 1, p. 28.

[28] Laksminarayana, "Puskaram ante Emiti?"

Bhīmaradhī (*vṛscikam*, Scorpion); Brahmaputrā/Vāhinī (*dhanus*, Sagitarius); Tungabhadrā (*makaram*, Capricorn); Sindhu (*kumbham*, Aquarius); and, Praṇithā (*mīnam*, Pisces).

Each year the river belonging to the constellation entered by Bṛhaspati attains the power of a *puṣkaram.* In that period, the waters of the associated river are at the height of its sacred powers. The Kṛṣṇā attains the powers of a *puṣkaram* during the period of the zodiac sign Virgo once every twelve years. As a result, hundreds of devotees visit the Kṛṣṇā *puṣkaram* every twelve years, to perform various religious activities, such as taking a purifying bath, offering prayers, meditation, and lighting a sacrificial fire in order to attain *mokṣa* (salvation).

For the Andhras, the Kṛṣṇā is not only a sacred river but a liquid form of the divine. She is the liquid *śakti* or female energy. As stated in the the *Kṛṣṇā Matatmyam,* Viṣṇu, during his incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, took the form of an *asvatha* tree (Ficus Religiosa) on the Sahyadri Mountains in the Western Ghats, and created the Kṛṣṇā River from his left side for the benefit of humankind. This is an important point, to which I will return shortly.

According to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the Supreme Spirit, Brahman, is Viṣṇu.

> "The creator Hari, sleeps upon the ocean, in the form of Brahman-involved in mystic slumber, the celestial personification of his own illusion, meditating on his own ineffable spirit…when the universal spirit wakes, the world revives."[29]

[29] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇu Purāṇam,* pp. p.17.

The two forms which are the essence of Viṣṇu as the Ultimate Reality are *pradhāna* (primary unresolved matter, or *prakṛtī*) and *puruṣa* (supreme man). In this state, Viṣṇu is said to be non-dual and the *purusa* (supreme man) is not differentiated from *prakṛti* (matter). In other words, Viṣṇu is undifferentiated from his śakti, Lakṣmī.

This notion is clearly illustrated in a 16th century black stone image of Lakṣmī-Viṣṇu from the Brijbehar Mandir in Avantipur, Kashmir (Figure 4.3). The figure is four-armed and seated on the back of Garuda, the vehicle of Viṣṇu. In the upper right and left hands the deity holds a cob of corn and a lotus, and in the lower right and left hands, a lotus and a book. A single breast, a circular earring, and the extra bracelets distinguish the left side of the image as the goddess Lakṣmī. In the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, the goddess states that:

> "Brahman embraces both the principle of existence and its state of existence, hence It (Brahman) is the eternal state (*padam*). (When differentiated) the existing principle is God Nārāyaṇa and its state of existence is the supreme Lakṣmī, i.e. myself.
> Therefore Brahman, the eternal is called Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa…"[30]

The supreme power of Viṣṇu is the goddess Lakṣmī, who identifies all states of being with her own self and is the active principle through which Viṣṇu moves into creation.

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[30] Gupta, trans. and notes, *Laksmi Tantra*, p.9.

> "Then the supreme Brahman, the supreme soul, the substance of the world, the lord of all creatures, the universal soul, the supreme ruler Hari, of his own will entered into matter and spirit, agitated the mutable and immutable principles, the season of creation being arrived…"[31]

The goddess Lakṣmī as Śakti-Prakṛti, often identified with a *padmā* (lotus) is a distinct state of the supreme and the womb of the universe.[32]

> "The imperturbable lotus standing in the waters between heaven and earth holds the worlds together. From the lotus arises Mount Meru, the primeval mountain, and world-axle which holds the waters and lets them flow to pervade everything."[33]

As stated in the *Sri-sukta,* Lakṣmī, the mother of all beings, is praised as Padmasambhava (lotus born), Padmesthitā (seated on a lotus), and Puskarini (abounding in lotus).[34] As a goddess on par with Viṣṇu, she is called Nārāyaṇasamāṛṣtā, and as the very essence of Viṣṇu, she is Viṣṇurupini.[35]

Since one of the epithets of the Kṛṣṇā River is Viṣṇurupini,[36] I propose that the Kṛṣṇā River created from Viṣṇu, as discussed above, is conceptualized as his Śakti and the divine personification of the goddess

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[31] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇupurāṇa,* p. 18.

[32] Weber, ed., *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa,* p. 533.

[33] J.A.B. van Buitenen, trans., *Mahābhārata*, vol. 1. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973-1978), p. 144.

[34] Nagesh D. Sonde, trans., *Śri-Sukta, Khila of Rg Veda Samhita* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications. 1998).

[35] *Lakṣmi Aṣtottaraśatanāmā.* p. 29-33.

[36] Laksminarayana, "Puskaram ante Emiti?"

Lakṣmī. My suggestion that the Krishna River is, in fact, the personification of Lakṣmī is underscored by iconography found within the temples of Vedadri, Mattapalli and Mangalagiri. The lintels on the doorway of the main shrines in these temples depicts a seated image of the goddess Lakṣmī holding lotuses in her two hands and flanked by elephants (Figure 2.23). At the corner-ends of the lintel, on either side, are the carvings of *pūrnakalaśa* (water pitcher) with coconuts and mango leaves. The *pūrnakalaśas* symbolize prosperity and abundance. The meaning of the Lakṣmī image itself is expressed in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. According to the text, after Lakṣmī arises from the ocean, the celestial elephants take up the waters of the sacred rivers, such as the Gangā, in vases of gold, and pour them over the goddess.[37] When Lakṣmī appears in this iconographic form, with two flanking elephants who pour sacred waters over her, she is referred to as Gajalakṣmī (Lakṣmī with *gaja*, elephants). Traditionally, Lakṣmī is propitiated as the goddess of beauty, intelligence, vegetation, and of all prosperity. Yet, in her form as Gajalakṣmī at the Nṛsiṁha temples, which are situated along the Kṛṣṇā River, the goddess, born of the ocean, signifies the purifying properties of the sacred river waters. Specifically, I propose that the Gajalakṣmī images on the lintels over the shrine doors are symbols of the adjacent Kṛṣṇā River, itself.

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[37] Wilson, trans., *Viṣṇupurāṇa,* p. 109.

The presence of anthropomorphic depictions of river goddesses on shrine doorways has a strong precedence in South Asian art, particularly northern Indian art. Representations of rivers, such as the Gangā and Yamuna, revered in particular for their purifying powers, are commonly seen as anthropomorphic figures flanking the doorways of temples (Figure 4.4). Due to their heavenly origins, the rivers are seen as an intermediary link between heaven and earth. Thus, devotees crossing the threshold of temples flanked by the images of river goddesses are symbolically cleansed in the waters of the rivers before they enter the sacred realm of the gods. Therefore, I suggest that the image of Lakṣmī on the lintels of the temples, bathed by the two elephants, is not only an embodiment of the Kṛṣṇā River, but, like the images of Gangā and Yamunā, washes off the impurities of the body and mind of the devotees. Further, the images of Lakṣmī seen on the doorways of lintels at the Nṛsiṁha temples remind the devotee of the sacred river that unifies the temple group. In addition, they support the ritual process by purifying the devotee as he or she passes over the threshold into the sacred shrine areas. Essential to human prosperity through successful cultivation and irrigation of land, the river itself not surprisingly becomes associated with the goddess Lakṣmī and life in its fullest sense. As an important component of the socio-economic conditions and religious practices, the Kṛṣṇā River played an integral role in the iconographic program of the five Nṛsiṁha temples along its banks.

Conventionally, the study of iconography is almost entirely conditioned by representations of deities in both sculpture and painting, particularly in Hinduism, where the worship of anthropomorphic forms serves as the pivot of the religion. In the case of the five Nṛsiṁha temples the Kṛṣṇā River, a form of the goddess manifested in nature—indeed, her purest form—is an essential part of the temple collective's iconographic program. The river, as the goddess Lakṣmī, the Śakti of Nṛsiṁha, not only serves as a physical bond for the five Nṛsiṁha temples, it also helps to articulate the broader Tantric iconography of the five temples, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.



Figure 4.1. The Kṛṣṇā River, Temple of Lakṣmīnrsimha, Vedadri, Andhra Pradesh



Figure 4.2. Trade Routes of Andhra Pradesh based on a drawing printed in *Historical Geography and Toponomy of Andhra Pradesh* by S.J. Mangalam. Drawing by John C. Huntington.



Figure 4.3. Lakṣmī-Viṣṇu, Brijbehar Mandir, Avantipura, Kashmir. Photograph by John C. Huntington.



Figure 4.4. Gangā, Rajshahi Museum, Rajshahi, India.
Photograph by John C. Huntington.

CHAPTER 5

THE FIVE LAKṢMĪNṚSIṀHA TEMPLES AND THE KṚṢṆĀ RIVER AS METAPHORS OF TANTRA

The primary aim of this Chapter is to discuss the prevalence of Tantra at the five Nṛsiṁha temples in this study. The underlying basis of this Chapter is, therefore, to explore and contextualize Nṛsiṁha's identity as a Vaiṣṇava Tantric deity in Andhra Pradesh. This is important because south Indian Hinduism has traditionally been seen as orthodox and Vedic in character, rather than Tantric. Yet recent research has brought to light the realization that, far from being rare, Tantrism is very widespread and, undeniably a commonality in much Hindu religious practice.

The term Tantra, literally meaning warp on a loom, can largely be described as a collection of practices that set forth certain doctrines. At the same time, Sir John Woodroffe, one of the foremost scholars of Tantrism in Asia, suggests that there is no coherent body of Hindu Tantric doctrine.[1] It varies according to the sect or school. The divisions differ according to the deities worshiped and the ritual practices that are followed. The

[1] Sir John Woodroffe, ed., *Principles of Tantra* (Madras: Ganesh & Co. Pvt Ltd., 1960), p. 19.

commonality of the different types of Tantra is more in methods of practice. Specifically, Tantra may be seen as an expression for any Indic religious system that serves as the guiding principle for hands-on and individual methods of attaining *mokṣa* (release), through the use of specific techniques.

Tantra is a very ancient methodology traceable in south Asia for nearly two thousand years. Over the past century or so, Tantra has been seen as aberrational, and has been typically connected with non-Vedic, non-orthodox, and specifically, the prohibited, the immoral, and the supernatural.[2] On the contrary, however, the fact that the main texts of Tantra are in Sanskrit and that learned Vedic Brahmaṇas are among the authors proves the role played by the orthodoxy in Tantric circles.[3] Moreover, my research indicates that Tantra, along with the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, guide the regular temple and household customs of most Hindus in various degrees. Yet few contemporary Hindus are aware that Tantric elements occur in beliefs and practices that are common-place in Hindu rituals that are viewed as mainstream. For example, contemporary Hindus commonly believe that regular elements of their practice, such as *mantra* (incantation), *bīja* (syllable), *yantra* (any instrument used for restraining), *mudrā* (seal,

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[2] Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p.38.

[3] David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 243.

symbolic gesture of hand)*,* construction of temples, consecration of images, and religious festivals, have no affiliation to anything Tantric.[4]

Until recently art-historical studies have focused on the regions of Kashmir, Bengal, Assam, and Orissa as the main Tantric centers in India. In contrast, south Indian art has been the focus of few examinations from the Tantric viewpoint, primarily because Tantra has been seen as a breach of orthodox conduct, and, therefore unacceptable to what has been seen as a highly orthodox Hindu culture in south India. Nevertheless, research conducted by R. Nagaswamy, S. K. Ramachandra Rao, and Padma Kaimal, among others, has not only shown the Tantric presence in south Indian Hindu art but also the early beginning and continued prevalence of Tantra there since the beginning of the Common Era.[5]

In this Chapter I will show the procedures of Tantric meditation that are outlined in the Vaiṣṇava ritual texts of the two schools of Vaiṣṇavism, that is, the Pāñcarātras and the Vaikhānasas. Specifically, I will illustrate a correlation between the subtle bodies of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* and the five Nṛsiṁhas at the temple of Vedadri. In addition, I will describe the Nṛsiṁha

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[4] Sir John Woodroffe, *Śakti and Śakta* (Madras: Ganesh and Company, reprint 2001), p.38; Douglas Renfrew Brooks, "Encountering the Hindu "Other", Tantrism and the Brahmans of South India," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*. vol 60. no. 3. p.406.

[5] R. Nagaswamy, *Tantric Cult of South India* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1982); S. K. Ramachandra Rao, *Agama-kosha*, vol. 3 (Bangalore: Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1990);Padma Kaimal, "Hidden Tantric Lessons in an Eighth-Century Temple," Presented at AAS Annual Meeting, New York, March 27-30, 2003.

Ṣatcakra meditation and its connections with the iconography of the Nṛsiṁha temples at Mattapalli and at Mangalagiri.

Vaiṣṇava Tantric texts

The Tantric texts of the Vaiṣṇavas are primarily known as the *Vaiṣṇavāgamās*. The term Āgamā means a traditional doctrine, or a collection of doctrines, or even, simply, a book. The subject matter of these Āgamās is theoretically divisible into four categories: *jnāna* (higher knowledge), which gives access to final emancipation; *yoga* (the doctrine and practice of concentration); *kriya* (action, that is all activities associated with construction of temples and installation of images); *cārya* (the performance of daily worship and other rites, such as festivals).[6] As mentioned above, the *Vaisnavāgamās* are divided into two categories, namely, Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa.

The philosophy of the Pāñcarātra texts establishes Viṣṇu as the supreme reality, conceiving all his divine aspects as pre-existent, without beginning or end and therefore infinite. In all his manifestations Viṣṇu, as the Supreme Being, is associated with a creative power, *śakti*, the feminine dynamic principle who is figuratively known as Lakṣmī. According to the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, one of the central texts of the Pāñcarātra, the goddess Lakṣmī is not only Viṣṇu's consort but also his inherent *śakti* who dwells

[6] M. M. Ganapati Sastri, ed., *Viṣṇu Saṃhitā.* (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1991), p.4.

eternally within him; the two are inseparable, and it is she who is the immediate cause of creation. The recognition of Pāñcarātra texts in temple rituals is closely related to the rise of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas and in the poets and singers of south India known as the Ālvārs. As the name implies, the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas emphasize Śrī (Lakṣmī) as indivisible from, and therefore equal to, Viṣṇu in importance. Traditionally, the Pāñcarātra texts are considered to be non-Vedic and Tantric in their characteristics.[7] Among the five Nṛsiṁha temples, explored in this study, the Vadapalli temple follows the Pāñcarātra practices outlined in Chapter 2. Therefore, this temple is unquestionably Tantric.

In contrast to the Pāñcarātra methods, the Vaikhānasas, who are a small community of priests in most Viṣṇu temples of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, claim their descent from the Vedas.[8] According to the Vaikhānasas, Viṣṇu is Adimurti, the Primordial Spirit, who pervades every being. Viṣṇu, along with Lakṣmī, is the origin, maintainer, and dissolution of life and fertility in all its manifestations.

At first glance, they, the Vaikhānasas would not appear to be Tantric. Intentionally linked to Vedic ceremony, the Vaikhānasas priests maintained certain conservatism, especially resisting the incorporation of devotional hymns and the worship of Ālvārs and *acāryas* (teachers). However,

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[7] See above Chapter 2, pp. 62-71.

[8] See above Chapter 2, pp. 56-62.

Rāmanuja, one of the prominent Pāñcarātra teachers of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community, brought the establishment of the more liberal Pāñcarātra traditions into the details of daily worship in temples throughout south India. The increased participation of worshippers from all social levels, with the establishment of the more liberal Pāñcarātra tradition, and the task of formulating details of daily worship in temples, is one of Rāmanuja's main legacies to the Vaiṣṇava faith as a whole. The temples at Mattapalli, Vedadri, Ketavaram, and Mangalagiri accept the Vaikhānasa practices, and, I suggest, are Tantric in nature. In particular the inclusion of the shrines to the Ālvārs, and the worship of the Vaikhānasa *ācāryas* (teachers), suggest an infusion of the Pāñcarātra ways of life.

All practices and notions constituting the Viṣṇu Tantras, including both the Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa texts, are based on the conception that the human body corresponds to, is even identical with, the universe. During the process of liberation, the individual is absorbed into Viṣṇu's absolute state, and the two are essentially identified as one.[9] Although the Ultimate transcends all duality, the godhead is conceived as having two aspects, masculine and feminine—Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī—whose union is the first step towards cosmic evolution. Thus, Viṣṇu Tantra may be broadly defined as 1)

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[9] Rao, *Agama-kosha*. vol. 3; Goudriaan, "Vaikhanasa Daily Worship"; Varadhacharya, *Āgamās.*

the transformation of the worshiper into the deity through meditation, and 2) the unification of the male and female as the universal truth.

According to *Vaiṣṇavāgamās*, Viṣṇu is the Supreme Spirit, Parabrahman. As the highest Puruṣa, he is all forms. He is one with all qualities and attributes, and, yet, at the same time without any form—without beginning, middle, or end. Lakṣmī, as Prakṛti, is the root cause of all beings before creation. Puruṣa and Prakṛti do not exist individually without each other. The two cannot be separated, for Brahman without Prakṛti is devoid of all action, and Prakṛti without Brahman is unconscious. Accordingly, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī create, and comprise the entire universe.

The Vaikhānasa and Pāñcarātra texts considered for this study are the *Kāśyapa's Book of Wisdom (Kāśyapa-Jnñānakāṇḍah), Lakṣmī Tantra*, *Viṣṇu Saṃhitā*, *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā, Sātvata Saṃhitā,* and the *Pauskara Saṃhitā.*[10] In additition to the primary sources, scholars such as S. K. Ramachandra Rao, Teun Goudriaan, and V. Varadachari have provided in-depth research and insights to the Vaiṣṇava Tantric observances.[11] Variations of underlying principles found in the manuals of both the Pāñcarātra and Vaikhānasa schools account for and give textual authority for

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[10] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom*; Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra*; *Viṣṇu Saṃhitā.* Sastri, ed.; Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*; P. P. Apte, ed., *Pauṣkara Saṃhitā* (Tirupati: Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidhyapeeta, 1991); Vraja Vallabha Dwivedi, ed., *Sātvata Saṃhitā* (Varanasi: Lakshmi Narayan Tiwari, 1982).

[11] Rao, *Agama-kosha*, vol. 3; Goudriaan, "Vaikhanasa Daily Worship; Varadhacharya, *Āgamās*.

the greater part of the activities in temples and in homes of most Vaiṣṇava practitioners today.

According to the textual sources mentioned above, practice is the main aspect of Tantrism. The Tantric path of action is usually called *sādhana*, which means performance or action leading to a goal. The first step in any Tantric practice is initiation into a sect, a sometimes very involved ritual whereby a secret *mantra* (incantation) is given to the chosen disciple by his teacher. Tantric initiations vary according to the different sects and according to the different teachers. Initiation, esotericism, and the necessity of a spiritual master are the most basic characteristics of the Vaiṣṇava Tantras. Several rites, such as *mantra* (incantation), *nyāsa* (placement), *mudrā* (hand gestures), and *dhyāna* (meditation) are some of the vital requirements of a Tantric *sādhana*. Sacred and ritual formulas based on *bījas* (syllables), believed to embody the very essence of the deity, transform the body of the worshiper into a divine one.

Ṣatcakra Meditation

Dhyāna (meditation) is one of the main aspects of both the Vaikhānasa and the Pāñcarātra Tantric practices.[12] The general goal of Tantric meditation is the complete unification of the body, speech, and mind of the

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[12] Dwivedi, ed., *Sātvata Saṃhitā*; Apte, ed., *Pauṣkara Saṃhitā*.; *Vimanarcanakalpa* cited in Varadhacharya, *Āgamās*, pp. 79-115.

practitioner to the body, speech, and mind of a chosen divinity. This is achieved through yogic rituals, awakening zones of consciousness, and activating the latent subtle energies. A process technically known as *kuṇḍalinī yoga* enables this yogic method (Figure 5.1). Kuṇḍalinī literally means coiled and refers to the *śakti* or female energy within the body in the form of a sleeping serpent. As the *Hathayogapradīpikā* states, *kuṇḍalinī* energy is static and present in all manifested phenomena.[13]

During the process of meditation, the practitioner visualizes six vital centers placed along the spine. These centers are envisioned as geometric figures, or *cakras*, placed on the vertical axis from the base of the trunk to the crown of the head, known as the seat of consciousness. The *cakras* are connected to each other by a central *nāḍi* (vein), Suṣumnā, with two lesser veins or channels on either side, known as Iḍā and Piṇgalā. The three *nāḍis* extend along the spinal column, from the reproductive, or generative, organs at the base to the top of the skull, and form a connecting link between the senses and the mind.

The main aim of Tantric yogic practices is to awaken the latent energy of *kuṇḍalinī* and cause it to flow upward in the central channel, Suṣumnā. The method of awakening the *kuṇḍalinī* is performed by physical and mental exercises, such as *āsana* (body postures), *prāṇāyāma* (control of breath), and

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[13] Pancham Sinh, trans., *Hathayogapradīpikā,* ed. Major B.D. Basu (Allshabad: Sudhindra Nath Vasu, 1915), p. 43.

dhāraṇā (intense mental concentration). When awakened, *kuṇḍalinī* travels upward along the central vein, Suṣumnā, from the lowest *cakra* at the base of the spine to the top of the crown. As she ascends, *kuṇḍalinī* pierces in turn each of the *cakras* that are tiered along the central column.

The usual listing of *cakras* is six, according to the *Ṣatcakra* (six-*cakra*) arrangement. However, the number of *cakras* may vary from two to nine or more, answering to the needs of different ritual yogic practices and reflecting different cosmological and theological methods. The *Yoga Upaniṣads* provide a detailed account of these divisions and indicate how the *yogin* can gain mastery over each of the elements by meditating on the deity that governs them.[14]

The first *cakra* is called Mūladhara (*mūla,* root) and is situated at the base of the trunk. The second *cakra* is located at the level of the sexual organs and is called Svādhiṣṭhāna. Positioned at the height of the navel is the third *cakra*, called the Maṇipura. The fourth *cakra*, called the Anāhata, is placed at the level of the heart. The fifth *cakra* is established in the throat and is known as Viśuddhi. In the middle of the forehead, between the two eyebrows is the sixth *cakra*, Ājñā. Above the six *cakra*s is Sahasrāra, symbolized by a thousand-petal lotus. This is the non-dual Primordial Self of the Absolute.

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[14] Pandit A. Mahadeva Sastri, ed., *Yoga Unanisad* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1920), p.329-331.

The first five *cakra*s represent the levels from the gross to the subtle elements of the universe. Starting at the bottom they are earth, water, fire, air, and ether. The five elements are represented by five geometric shapes — square (earth), crescent moon (water), triangle (fire), six-pointed star (air), and circle (ether). The basic principle in all forms of contemplation and meditation in *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is that the energy centers should convolute back to the primal source. This means that the earth (Mūladhara Cakra) dissolves into water (Svādhiṣṭhāna Cakra); water is resolved into fire (Maṇipura Cakra); fire merges into air (Anāhata Cakra); air is absorbed into ether (Viśuddhi Cakra); and ether merges into the creative power (Ājñā Cakra), which collapses into Brahman (Sahasrāra). Once Kuṇḍalinī Śakti ascends to the highest psychic center at the crown of the head, the body of the *yogin* and the body of the chosen deity are resolved into a primal unity.

Pancanṛsiṁha Temple at Vedadri and the Five Subtle Bodies of *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga*

My research suggests a correlation between the five subtle bodies relating to the first five *cakras* of the meditation cycle and the five Nṛsiṁhas worshipped at the temple of Vedadri. The temple site at Vedadri is generally called *Pancanṛsiṁha Kshetram* (literally meaning the "sacred place of five Nṛsiṁhas"). The five forms of Nṛsiṁha are: Vīra Nṛsiṁha (powerful);

Śalagrāma Nṛsiṁha (a sacred black stone pervaded by the presence of Nṛsiṁha); Jvāla Nṛsiṁha (emitting flames of fire); Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha (Nṛsiṁha with his consort Lakṣmī); and Yogānṛsiṁha (yogic posture). I will show that each of these forms of Nṛsiṁha, including their names, can be interpreted in relation the *cakra* system.

First, the term *vīra* acceptably means mighty or powerful. An analysis of the *Nṛsiṁha mantra* described in the *Nāradapurāṇā* (875-1000 C.E) shows a definite association between the *vīra* aspect of Nṛsiṁha and the destruction of the demon-king Hiraṇyakaśipu.[15] According to V.S. Agrawala, Nṛsiṁha is a symbol of the uncontrolled energy, whose universal power manifests at the level of matter and creates the Man-Lion form.[16] In addition, an interpretation of the *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* by Muralidhar Rangaswamy outlines the worldly aspects of Nṛsiṁha.[17] Undeniably, the emergence of the deity from the palace pillar in order to kill Hiraṇyakaśipu not only marks his initial manifestation on earth but presents evidence of Nṛsiṁha's temporal nature. Therefore, I propose that the image of Vīra Nṛsiṁha situated in a cave on the mountainside at Vedadri, symbolizes the primary element earth associated with the Mūladhara Cakra that is at the root of a meditational process.

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[15] Hemendra Nath Chakravorty, trans. and annotated, *The Nārada Purāṇā,* part 3 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), pp.1008-1029.

[16]V.S. Agrawala. *Matsyapurāṇā.* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), p.262.

[17] Muralidhar Rangaswamy. www.narasimhajayanti.html

The *śalagrāma* form of Nṛsiṁha situated in the waters of the Kṛṣṇā River may be identified with water, the second of the five elements and thereby the Svādhiṣṭhāna Cakra (Figure 2.49). The divine importance of the Kṛṣṇā River as a component of Viṣṇu himself has already been discussed in Chapter 3.[18] Furthermore, as extolled in the *Padmapurāṇā*, the importance of the *śalagrāma* is not only the stone itself, but also the water that surround the stone.[19]

The third of the five elements, fire, is commonly described in Sanskrit as *agni*, *pāvaka*, and *jvalanaha*, to name a few. Nṛsiṁha's connection with fire is clearly expressed in the narrative of Prahlāda, where he is said to destroy the demon-king, Hiraṇyakaśipu "with a face blazing like the destructive fire of deluge."[20] Subsequently, as told in the *sthalapurāṇā* (sacred history) of the Vedadri Temple, the deity settles himself on top of the hill in a blaze of fire as Jvāla Nṛsiṁha (Figure 2.47).[21] Hence, I contend that in this form Nṛsiṁha is linked with the element fire and the Maṇipura Cakra.

Finally, my research substantiates an apparent link between the shrine images in the main temple at Vedadri and the *cakras* associated with the fourth and fifth elements, air and ether. The fourth element, air, aligned

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[18] See above Chapter 4. pp.157-160

[19] Deshpande, trans. and annotated, *The Padma-Purāṇa,* pp. 2728-2733.

[20] Siddheswar Jena, trans. and notes, *Śrinarasimhapurāṇ*, p. 348.

[21] See above Chapter 2, p. 44.

with the Anāhata Cakra, is situated in the heart and is considered to be the residence of the female and male principles—nature and its core essence—*Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*.[22] Within yogic practices, it is in the heart *cakra* that the Kuṇḍalinī Śakti first appears a goddess and is united with the male god. In the case of the main shrine image at the temple, I argue that Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha, situated on the base of the shrine image, characterizes the Anāhata Cakra (Figure 2.46). Lakṣmī and Nṛsiṁha signify the ultimate union of nature with its inner self. The two together symbolize *prāṇa* (air, breath) that is the core essence of life.

In *yoga*, the last element, ether, consumes and destroys the qualities of the wind element. That is to say, Prakṛti (Lakṣmī) and Puruṣa (Nṛsiṁha) merge into the supreme Atman identified by Yogānṛsiṁha atop the base (Figure 2.45). Ether is the most subtle of the five elements, unchanging and undifferentiated. In this form, Nṛsiṁha is the homogeneous Puruṣa, "*Yogiṣasthāvata* (Lord of Yogis), *Ṣaraṇya bhavābdhipota* (the Eternal One)"[23] At this stage there is no experience of division or diversity.

I suggest that by worshipping at the five Nṛsiṁha shrines at Vedadri, a practitioner directs the vital energies of his body to the presiding deities of each *cakra*, namely, the Panca Nṛsiṁhas. According to the *Vimanarcanakalpa* of the *Vaikhānasāgamās*, the union between the self

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[22] Pandit A. Mahadeva Sastri, ed., *Yoga Unanisad* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1920), p. 329-331.

[23] *Nṛsiṁhastotramu*, (Madras: Bala Sarasvati Book Depot, 1997), p.4.

(practitioner) and Viṣṇu is known as *yoga*.[24] By the power of *yoga*, the *yogin* ultimately attains the supreme godhead and becomes one with Brahman. In other words, the practitioner attains Yogānṛsiṁha in the main shrine of Vedadri.

Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra Meditation

In this next section, I will discuss a variation of the Ṣatcakra process, known as the Nṛsiṁha *Ṣatcakra* meditation, based on specific ritual texts. In the following two sections, I will illustrate a connection between the Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakras and the iconography in the temples of Mattapalli and Mangalagiri.

According to the *Śāradā Tilaka Tantram*, the *Ṣatcakras* are identified with Nṛsiṁha.[25] The initiated practitioner performs a series of ritualistic acts, such as the utterance of the *bīja* (sound syllable) and the symbolic touching of the specific parts of his body that corresponds to each *cakra*. Each of the six *cakras* is made up of three concentric circles—inner, middle, and outer. The inner circle of each *cakra* contains a *bīja* (syllable sound). The first *cakra* is Ācakra, located in the heart and known by the syllable *Kṣaum* (Figure 5.2). The second *cakra*, is located in the head and identified by the sound *Śrīṁ* (Figure 5.3). On the crown of the head is the Mahācakra, recognized by the syllable *Aiṁ* (Figure 5.4). Next, the Sakalaloka-rakṣana-

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[24] *Vimanarcanakalpa* cited in Varadhacharya, *Āgamās*, pp. 79-115.

[25] Arthur Avalon, ed., *Śāradā Tilaka Tantram* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), pp. 667-680.

cakra is located all over the body and identified by *Klīm* (Figure 5.5). Dyucakra is found in the eyes and has the corresponding sound *Oṁ* (Figure 5.6). And, finally, the Asurāntakacakra is placed in the regions surrounding the *yogin* and identified by the sound *Hūṁ* (Figure 5.7).

In the middle circle of each *cakra* is the *Nṛsiṁhagāyatrī* mantra:

> *Nṛsiṁhaāya vidmahe vajranakhāya dhīmahi, tannah siṁhah pracodayāt.*
>
> Let us think well, aware of Nṛsiṁha, the lightening-nailed. May the lion promote our thought.[26]

The six outer circles include six incantations corresponding to six qualities of the deity, namely, Ānandātmā (bliss), Priyātmā (love), Jyotirātmā (light or energy), Mayātmā (illusion), Yogātmā (contemplative soul), and Samāptātmā (the cessation of all [evil]). The *Atharvanīya Ṣatcakropaniṣad* states that a practitioner, by meditating on the six *cakras* of Nṛsiṁha while placing the deity within one's body, attains success in all regions, among all beings, and, finally, release or *mokṣa.*[27]

Mattapalli Temple

The iconographic program of the main shrine door at the Mattapalli Temple offers further evidence of the practice of Tantra in this temple group

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[26] G.A. Jacob, ed., *The Mahānārāyaṇā Upaniṣad of the Atharva Veda* (Bombay: Government Central Book Depot, 1888), p. 4.

[27] *Atharvanīya Ṣatcakropaniṣad* cited in Sir John Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., reprint 2003), pp. 270-272.

(Figure 2.23). An examination of the six individual panels on the west door suggests a correlation with the *Ṣatcakras* explained above. Although the six panels do not seemingly follow the order of the six *cakra*s, I propose that the similarities in their names suggest the connection.

Nṛsiṁha's emergence from the pillar as the first occurrence of the deity's incarnation may be related to the first step of the meditation cycle, Ācakra (Figure 5.8). Next, the term Sucakra, translating as the beloved, or Priyātmā, references Nṛsiṁha's association with his female counterpart, and may be illustrated by the panel of Nṛsiṁha seated with Lakṣmī (Figure 5.9). This is also reiterated in the *bīja* sound *Śrīṁ,* denoting the goddess Śrī or Lakṣmī. The position of the Mahācakra on the crown suggests a being that is in a high state of meditation. This could verily be suggested by the image of Nṛsiṁha in the meditational posture of a *mahāyogin* (Figure 5.10). Next, I propose that the Sakalaloka-raksana-cakra, meaning protection of all, may be illustrated by Nṛsiṁha bestowing grace upon Prahlāda, as a symbol of all mankind (Figure 5.11). Dyucakra, or the path of *yoga*, may correspond readily with Nṛsiṁha seated within a yogic posture with legs bound by a band of cloth (Figure 5.12). Finally, the Asurāntakacakra, literally meaning the end of all demon-kings, readily correlates with the killing of Hiraṇyakaśipu, a symbol of all evil (Figure 5.13). At the end of the *Ṣatcakra* meditation and the elimination of all that is wicked, the practitioner experiences a physical and mental integration with Nṛsiṁha and a spiritual

union with the cosmos. The images on the main door of Mattapalli illustrates the first of the two Tantric goals, that is, the transformation of the yogic practitioner into the deity.

The identity of the ritual specialist with Nṛsiṁha is further demonstrated in the *mahāyagña* (sacrificial rite) of Nṛsiṁha performed at the Mattapalli Temple by the late Śrī Mukkur Lakṣmīnṛsimhāchariar Swamy (d. 2001).[28] According to the temple authorities at Mattapalli, the deity Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha, invariably revealed himself within the late Ācarya, at every ceremony. During the process known as Nṛsiṁha's *āvirbhavam* (to take pocession), the Ācarya, upon meditating (Figures 5.14, 5.15) on Nṛsiṁha, received the presence of the deity inside himself (Figure 5.16). That is to say, he is Nṛsiṁha seen in the main shrine of the temple (Figure 5.17).

Although the central shrine image is a single outcropping of a rock, the devotees at the temple of Mattapalli worship it as Yogānanda Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha (Figure 2.20). Their belief not only identifies Nṛsiṁha as a *yogin* but also implies the inherent presence of his female counterpart, Lakṣmī. According to the *Vaiṣṇavāgamās*, the *parā* (highest) form of Viṣṇu is continually accompanied by his consort Śrī Lakṣmī (Figure 2.75), or of his wives, Śrī and Bhu (Earth) (Figure 2.15), and sometimes by eight or twelve of his Śaktis.[29]

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[28] *Śrī Mukkur Nruhari Hrudhayam,* released on Puratāsi Swati (9.20.01) at Śrī Mattapally Maha Kshetram by Śrī Swati Maha Narasimha Maha Yagna Trust, Madras.

The *Lakṣmī Tantra* maintains that all *mantras* have a grading system of which the highest in rank are the supreme *mantras*, which are equated with the final stages of eternal release of a practitioner.[30] The eight syllables of "*Oṁ namo Nārāyaṇāya*" are considered to be one of the primary *mantras* of the deity Viṣṇu. Etymologically, Nārāyaṇā is the support of the entire universe of sentient and non-sentient beings (Nāra= mortal and spiritual; āyaṇā=support or seat). In the meditation of Mahāviṣṇu, concentrating on the eight syllables is considered to be one of the primary ways of achieving union with the Highest Self—Narayana.[31] The eight syllables have the characteristics of eight *prakṛtis,* or *śaktis,* as their *atman* (soul). During *yogic* meditation, the syllables of the *mantra* are fixed in the heart, shoulders, thigh, and feet of the practitioner.

On the north door of the main shrine at Mattapalli are the eight forms of Lakṣmī known as the Aṣṭalakṣmī (Figure 2.6).[32] My research suggests that these eight forms of Lakṣmī are the eight Śaktis of Viṣṇu that are contained within the *mantra* of Nārāyaṇā.

Additionally, above the doors on the lintel are inscribed the Telugu words "*Vaikunṭa dvāramu*," meaning doorway to Vaikunṭa (Viṣṇu's heavenly

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[29] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra,* pp. 44-48; Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā,* p. 53.

[30] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra,* p. 122.

[31] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom,* pp.308-312; Chakravorty, trans. and annotated, *The Nārada Purāṇā.* part 3. pp. 990-991.

[32] See Chapter 2, pp 42-43; Chapter 3, pp. 134-135.

abode) (Figure 5.18). Typically, these words are written atop the lintel of the main doorway to the central shrine of Viṣṇu temples in Andhra Pradesh, suggesting the doorway as a path of release into Viṣṇu's highest realm (Figure 5.19). However, at the Mattapalli Temple, the words are inscribed on the lintel of the side door of the central shrine, above the Aṣṭalakṣmī (Figure 5.20). Therefore, I argue that it is not the doorway that shows the practitioner a way to Vaikunṭa, but the goddess Lakṣmī herself, represented in her eight forms as Aṣṭalakṣmī and the eight-syllables of the *mantra* "*Oṁ namo Nārāyaṇāya*".

According to the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, Lakṣmī assumes the form of *mantras* in order to protect the adepts who meditate on them.[33] Furthermore, as also stated in the *Lakṣmī Tantra*,

> From these (the mantras) gradually lead him [adept] to the way of purity and (make) him a master in the (science of) Śabdabrahman, thus finally guiding him to the (realm) of absolute Śrī."[34]

In addition, I propose that the image of Gajalakṣmī (Figure 2.25) seen on the lintel of the main doorway is the culmination of the Aṣṭalakṣmī seen on the north door of the main shrine. First, the term *Oṁ* at the beginning of the *mantra*, considered the means of attainment and deep concentration is

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[33] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra*, p. 120.

[34] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra,* p. 121.

also the highest Śakti and the goddess Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī, as the "eternal concentrated (mantra) [*Oṁ*] is the essence of all realities"[35]

> "For those who seek heaven and want to cross (the samsāra), it (*oṁ*) serves as a boat… O lord of gods, consider the means (of attainment [practice], *sādhana*), attainment (*pratipatti*), application (*viniyoga*) and deep concentration (*dhāraṇā*),—(all these) as belonging to this bīja."[36]

At the beginning of the *mantra* "*Oṁ namo Nārāyaṇāya,*" Lakṣmī may be seen as the intrinsic link between the realm of earthly existence and the realm of the divine. Thus, the goddess, embodied in the image of Gajalakṣmī on the lintel of the west door, protects the practitioner during his Tantric meditation and leads him to her realm.

Next, Lakṣmī is also "…known as Kuṇḍalinī which contains the entire creation in a coiled (i.e. concentrated) form…" and the central channel that is vital to a yogic practice.[37] According to the *Lakṣmī Tantra*,

> "The arterial duct called *suṣumṇā*, which is the most important in the complex of ducts and which is described in the sacred texts as being the vehicle of emancipation, the mighty vehicle or the vehicle of yoga, is called the subtle *Viṣṇuśakti*, which is identical with myself. It forms the basis for all objects on which (the yogin's) concentration is focused and runs through the human body from head down to the end. That (duct) which encases the supreme space (*brahmarandhra*) is called *suṣumṇā*. O Śakra, it is myself who am present in

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[35] Gupta, trans. and notes, *Laksmi Tantra,* p. 132.

[36] Gupta, trans. and notes, *Laksmi Tantra,* p. 132.

[37] Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, p. 22.

> all embodied beings as the *suṣumṇā* duct in their bodies with the view to the final liberation of all souls who are distressed in the *saṃsāra.*"[38]

Consequently, as an active Śakti of Viṣṇu, the goddess energizes the six *cakra*s represented by the six Nṛsiṁhas (Figure 5.21) on the west door of the main shrine.

Thus, the iconographic program at the Mattapalli Temple and the religious practices illustrate the two Tantric goals. 1) The Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra meditation transforms a practitioner into Nṛsiṁha, through the power of his Kuṇḍalinī Śakti, Lakṣmī. 2) The association of the male and female as Nṛsiṁha and his Śakti, is realized within the *yogin*, as a non-distinguishable absolute unity, personified as Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha, in the single outcropping of the rock, within the main shrine of the temple.

Mangalagiri

At the temple of Mangalagiri, the Nṛsiṁha *Ṣatcakra* meditation is implied by a focus on the beginning and the end of the meditation, manifested in the images of central shrines of the two Nṛsiṁha temples—Pānakālanṛsiṁha (Figure 2.65) and Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha (Figure 2.75).

The deity Pānakālanṛsiṁha is also known as Sudarśana Nṛsiṁha.[39] Sudarśana is one of the primary weapons of Viṣṇu, the *cakra*. Generally, the

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[38] Gupta, trans. and notes *Laksmi Tantra,* p. 351.

[39] See above Chapter 2, p. 51.

association of Sudarśana *cakra* as an iconographic attribute of Viṣṇu is that of a highly destructive weapon. In the course of time, the *cakra* as an independent agent of Viṣṇu's creative and annihilative powers became a separate deity in its own right.[40] Although the Sudarśana *cakra* can be pictured as a terrifying deity of destruction, in south India the worship of the *cakra* consists largely of yogic meditation.[41]

Within the south Indian tradition, the Sudarśana is also associated with Nṛsiṁha, the most fierce of the *avataras* (incarnation) of Viṣṇu. An image in the Madras Government Museum datable to the 18th century clearly illustrates the ferocious nature of both the deities.[42] On the front is the anthropomorphic form of the sixteen-armed Sudarśana. The reverse is an eight-armed image of Nṛsiṁha, shown in the act of disemboweling the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu. This destructive notion is evident in the *sthalapurāṇā* of the Mangalagiri Temple, where Nṛsiṁha kills the demon Namuci from within the Sudarśana *cakra*.

In the *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, a Pāñcarātra text, the image of Sudarśana is clearly portrayed as standing within a *ṣaṭkoṇa* (six pointed) diagram. Basically, the *ṣaṭkoṇa* is two superimposed triangles, one pointing upward and the other pointing down. In Tantra, the two triangles represent

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[40] For a detailed account of Sudarśana see, W.E. Begley, *Viṣṇu's Flaming Wheel: The Iconography of the Sudarśana-Cakra* (New York: New York University Press, 1973).

[41] Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, pp. 279-298.

[42] Begley, *Viṣṇu's Flaming Wheel,* Figures 66-67.

the male and the female with the upright triangle associated with the male principle and fire, and the downward pointing triangle associated with the female principle and water. The Pāñcarātra doctrine of the six *gunas* (qualities), which in various arrangements make up the created universe, may also be linked symbolically with the *ṣaṭkoṇa* emblem.[43]

In most south Indian temples, the image of Nṛsiṁha located on the reverse of a Sudarśana *cakra* is traditionally depicted in a yogic posture, seated within a *ṣaṭkoṇa* symbol (Figure 5.22). This is because both Sudarśana and Nṛsiṁha are widely connected with *yoga* and meditation. Moreover, in *yoga*, the *ṣaṭkoṇa* is a symbol of the air element, situated in the heart, and the ultimate union of the male and female principles.[44] The *ṣaṭkoṇa* in which the two triangles are conjoined represents the *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, as the Brahman that creates the phenomenal world manifested in space and time.[45]

Further, in the *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā,* the Sudarśana is identified as the Śakti of Viṣṇu—Laksmi.[46] Lakṣmī is Viṣṇu's vibration in the form of the manifested world, while, at the same time, she is an independent deity in her own right. At the time of creation, the goddess manifests herself into two

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[43] See above Chapter 2, pp. 64-65.

[44] Sastri, ed., *Yoga Unanisad*, p. 426.

[45] Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, pp. 38-39.

[46] Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, p. 26.

forms, 1) Bhūti Śakti (source of creation), and 2) Kriya Śakti (will to create).[47] This Kriya Śakti is Sudarśana, who is also the wheel of time and Viṣṇu's "will to be."[48] Thus, Kriya Śakti and Sudarśana represent the active aspect of Viṣṇu's transcendental nature that functions independently of him.

I propose that the two temples at Mangalagiri can be equated to the beginning and the end of the Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra yogic practices. First, the form of Sudarśananṛsiṁha in the main shrine on top of the hill may certainly represent the beginning of the meditation that starts in the Ācakra located in the heart (Figure 2.65). This concept is reinforced by the inherent connection of the *ṣaṭkoṇa* (six-pointed star) with the heart *cakra*, as well as the two deities—Sudarśana and Nṛsiṁha. Sudarśananṛsiṁha is energized by Lakṣmī, the active Kriya Śakti, as a component of himself. Lakṣmī and Sudarśananṛsiṁha act as a single principle, the transcendent Brahman that is the aggregate of the six *gunas* (qualities) and the path of *yogins.* The individual Brahman—Nṛsiṁha and Lakṣmī—represented as Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha in the second temple, signifies the end of the Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra meditation and the highest goal of *yogins* (Figure 2.75). At this stage, the practitioner and LakṣmīNṛsiṁha are in essence the same.

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[47] Krishnamacharya, rev., *Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā*, p. 24.

[48] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom,* p. 119.

Summary

In summary, the iconography at the temples of Vedadri, Mattapalli, and Mangalagiri reflect the Tantric meditations outlined in the *kuṇḍalinī yoga* and the Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra meditation described above. The religious practices at the temple of Vadapalli adhere to the Pāñcarātric doctrines that are Tantric in Nature. The practices at the Nṛsiṁha temple of Ketavaram show an infusion of the rituals promoted by the Vaikhānasa and Pāñcarātra texts. Probably due to the small size of the complex and the lack of financial support, the iconography at this temple is limited to a single image of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha in the main shrine.

The role of the Kṛṣṇā River in yogic meditation

In addition to the association of the five temples with Tantra, the meditational practices outlined in the *Vaisṇavāgamās* are further exemplified in the role of the Kṛṣṇā River as the goddess Lakṣmī.[49] One of the most important aspects of *yoga* is the inner circulation and the control of *prāṇa* (breath) that is made possible by the three central *nāḍis* (channels): Suṣumnā, Iḍā, and Piṅgalā. This enables the practitioner to awaken the latent energy of the Kuṇḍalinī at the base of his trunk and cause it rise up the central channel. The union of the Kuṇḍalinī Śakti and the Absolute is the ultimate goal of all yogic practitioners. This refers to the dissolution of

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[49] See above Chapter 4, p. 153-160.

the microcosm of *yogin's* body into the macrocosm of the deity. According to the *Kāśyapa's Book of Wisdom*, *mokṣa* (release) is the unity of the individual soul and the universal soul, Viṣṇu.[50]

As I have already discussed above, Goddess Lakṣmī recognizes herself as the central *nāḍi*, Suṣumnā. She is also Kuṇḍalinī Śakti and the energy of Viṣṇu. In Chapter 4 of this dissertation I have identified the goddess as the Kṛṣṇā River (*nadī*), the life-force of the region of Andhra Pradesh.[51] Interestingly, the two terms *nāḍi* (vein/channel) and *nadī* (river) are derived from the common root *naḍ*, suggesting movement.

In the *Kulārnava Tantra*, the union of the individual soul with the universal is described as water poured into water.[52] This concept is further reiterated in a passage from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that uses the analogy of the single rivers that flow into the ocean.[53] According to the *Lakṣmī Tantra*, Viṣṇu is identified as the waveless ocean, the waves of which, when agitated, correspond to Lakṣmī. I propose that the goddess Lakṣmī as the Kṛṣṇā River is the Kuṇḍalinī Śakti that flows across the state of Andhra Pradesh into the Bay of Bengal—equivalent to Vaikunṭa of Viṣṇu. Kuṇḍalinī Śakti, or Lakṣmī, is united with Nṛsiṁha with whom she is essentially one.

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[50] Goudriaan, trans. and annotated, *Kaśyapa's Book of Wisdom,* p. 120.

[51] See above chapter 4, pp.147-153.

[52] Taranatha Vidyaratna, *Kulārnava Tantra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, reprint 2000), p. 238.

[53] Swami Swahananda, trans., *The Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (Madras: Śrī Ramakrishna Math, 1956), p. 458.

It is Nṛsiṁha in his Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha aspect who comes forth and endows himself with all forms of worldly life.

It may be further suggested that the five temples located along the river correspond to the *cakras* located along the central channel of the *yogin's* body (Figure 5.23).[54] I suggest that the physical journey of the lay pilgrim to the five Nṛsiṁha temples can be conceptually equated to the Tantric meditational process of the initiated practitioner. The Kṛṣṇā River as Kuṇḍalinī within the *yogin's* body energizes the five *cakras* represented by the five temples. At the end of the spiritual journey, the practitioner reaches Vaikunṭa, the cosmic ocean, Viṣṇu's abode, and becomes one with Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. The divine couple encompass the Ultimate Reality that is realized at the highest center at the crown of the *yogin's* head.

The deity LakṣmīNṛsiṁha as the main shrine image of the five temples situated at Vadapalli, Mattapalli, Vedadri, Ketavaram, and Mangalagiri may be seen as a force acting within the pilgrim/practitioner that must be realized for meditative experience. The outer physical reality of the image is the inner reality of the thought process of the *yogin*. On a higher level of insight, the deity is the radiation of the ultimate realty and the manifestation of the practitioners' being.

[54] I would like to acknowledge Dr. John C. Huntington for suggesting the concept of the five Nṛsiṁha temples as the five *cakras.*

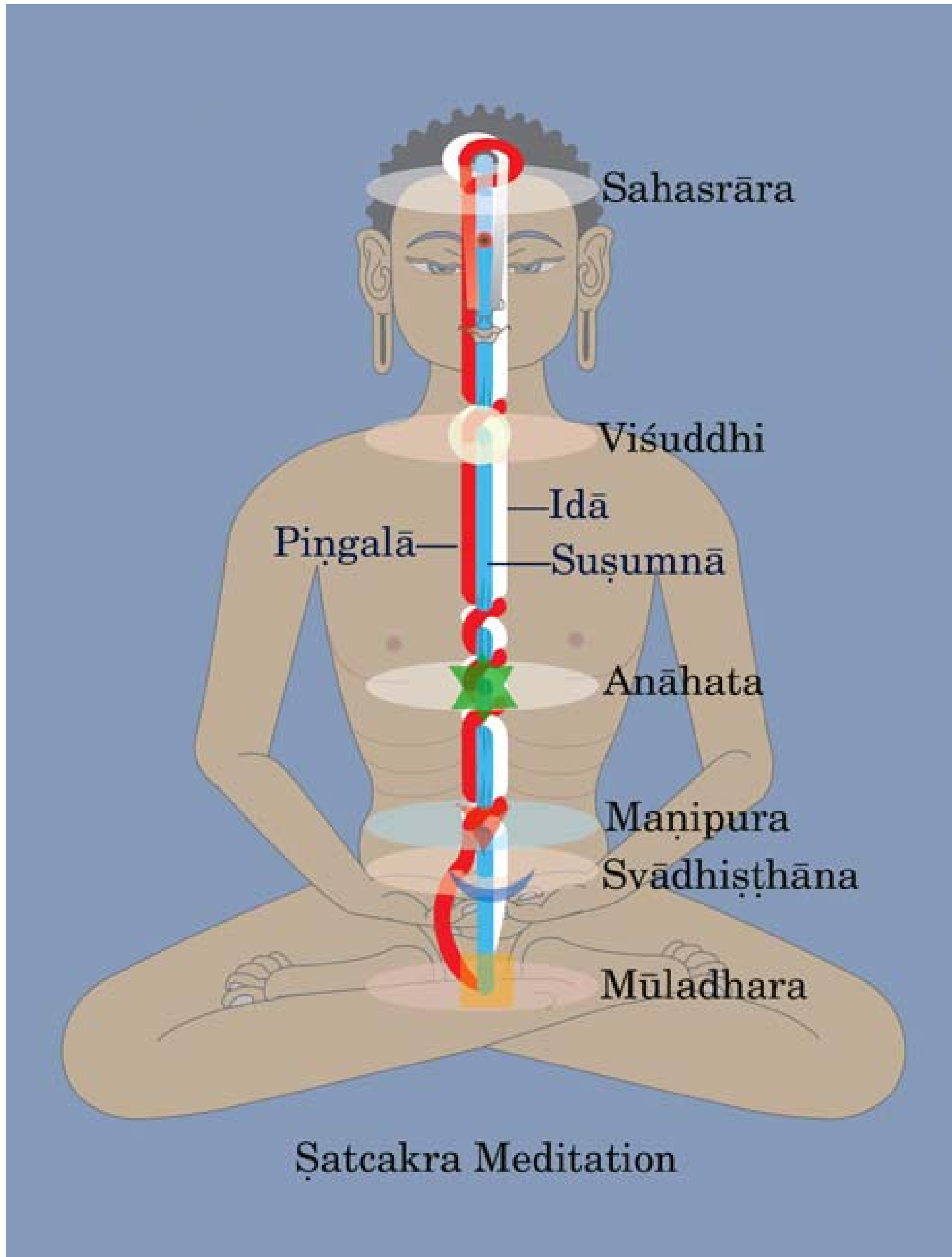


Figure 5.1. Ṣatcakra Meditation
Drawing by John C. Huntington.

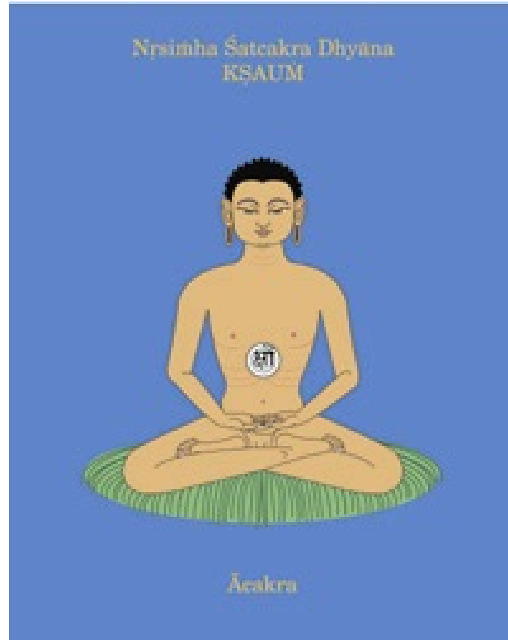


Figure 5.2. Ācakra, Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra Meditation.
Drawing by John C. Huntington.

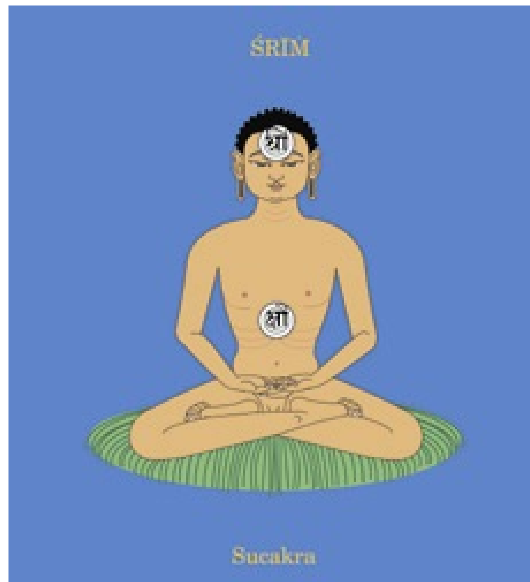


Figure 5.3. Sucakra, Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra Meditation.
Drawing by John C. Huntington.

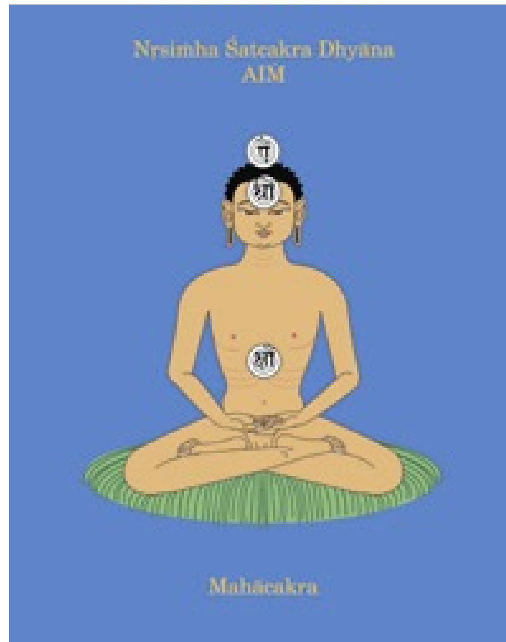


Figure 5.4. Mahācakra, Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra Meditation.
Drawing by John C. Huntington.

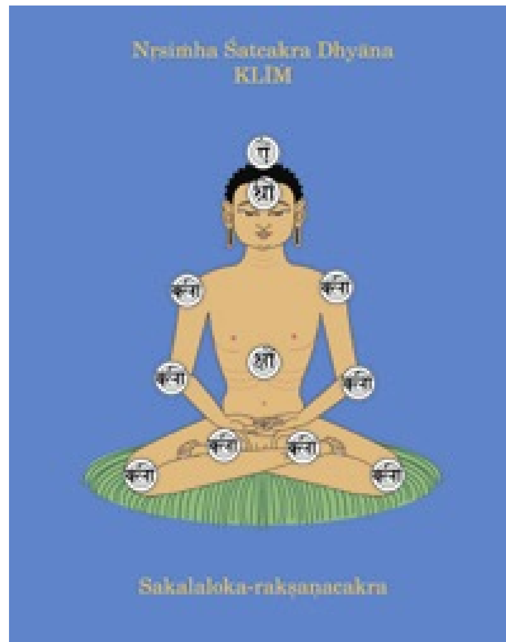


Figure 5.5. Sakalaloka-rakṣaṇacakra, Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra Meditation.
Drawing by John C. Huntington.

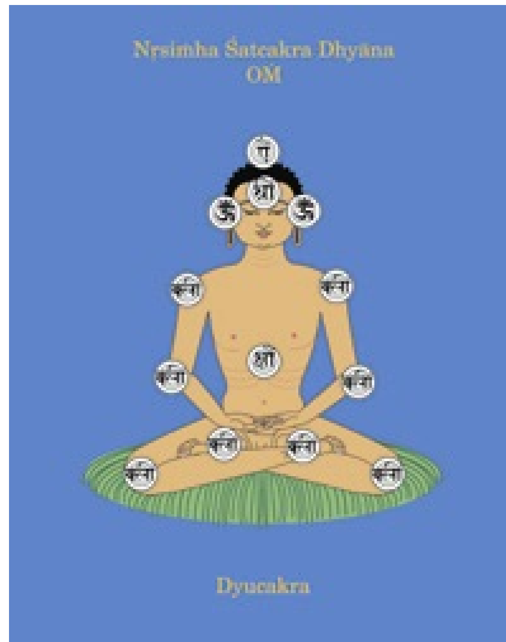


Figure 5.6. Dyucakra, Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra Meditation.
Drawing by John C. Huntington.

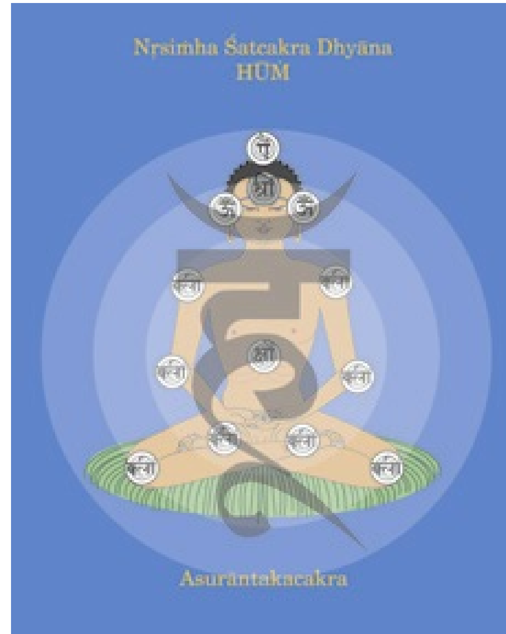


Figure 5.7. Asurāntakacakra, Nṛsiṁha Ṣatcakra Meditation.
Drawing by John C. Huntington.



Figure 5.8. Nṛsiṁha emerging from the pillar.
Main shrine door. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.9. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha. Main shrine door.
Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.10. Nṛsiṁha as a mahāyogin. Main shrine door. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.11. Nṛsiṁha bestowing grace upon Prahlāda. Main shrine door. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.12. Yoga Nṛsiṁha. Main shrine door.
Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.13. Nṛsiṁha killing the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu.
Main shrine door. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.14. Nṛsiṁha Āvirbhavam of Late Śrī Mukkur Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.15. Nṛsiṁha Āvirbhavam of Late Śrī Mukkur Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.16. Nṛsiṁha Āvirbhavam of Late Śrī Mukkur Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha
Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.17. Nṛsiṁha Āvirbhavam of Late Śrī Mukkur Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha
Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.18. Lintel above north door of central shrine.
Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.19. Doorway to the main shrine, Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha Temple,
Vadapalli, Nalgonda District, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.20. North door of central shrine.
Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 5.21. West door of central shrine showing the six *cakras* associated with the six Nṛsiṁhas and the goddess Lakṣmī on the lintel. Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha temple, Mattapalli, Andhra Pradesh.

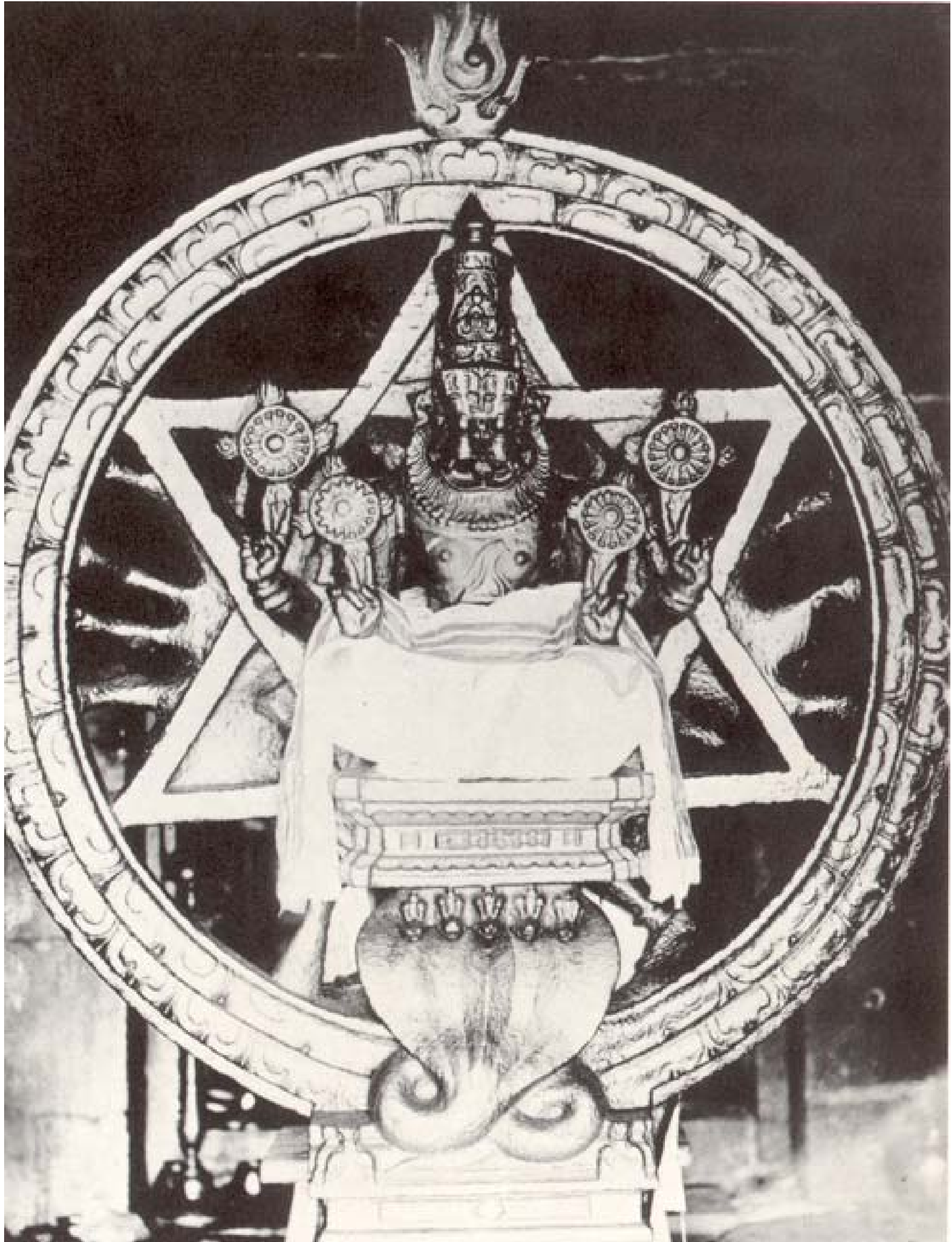


Figure 5.22. Yoga Nṛsiṁha (Reverse of Sudarśana). 17th century C.E.
Śrī Varadarāja Perumāl Temple, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu.

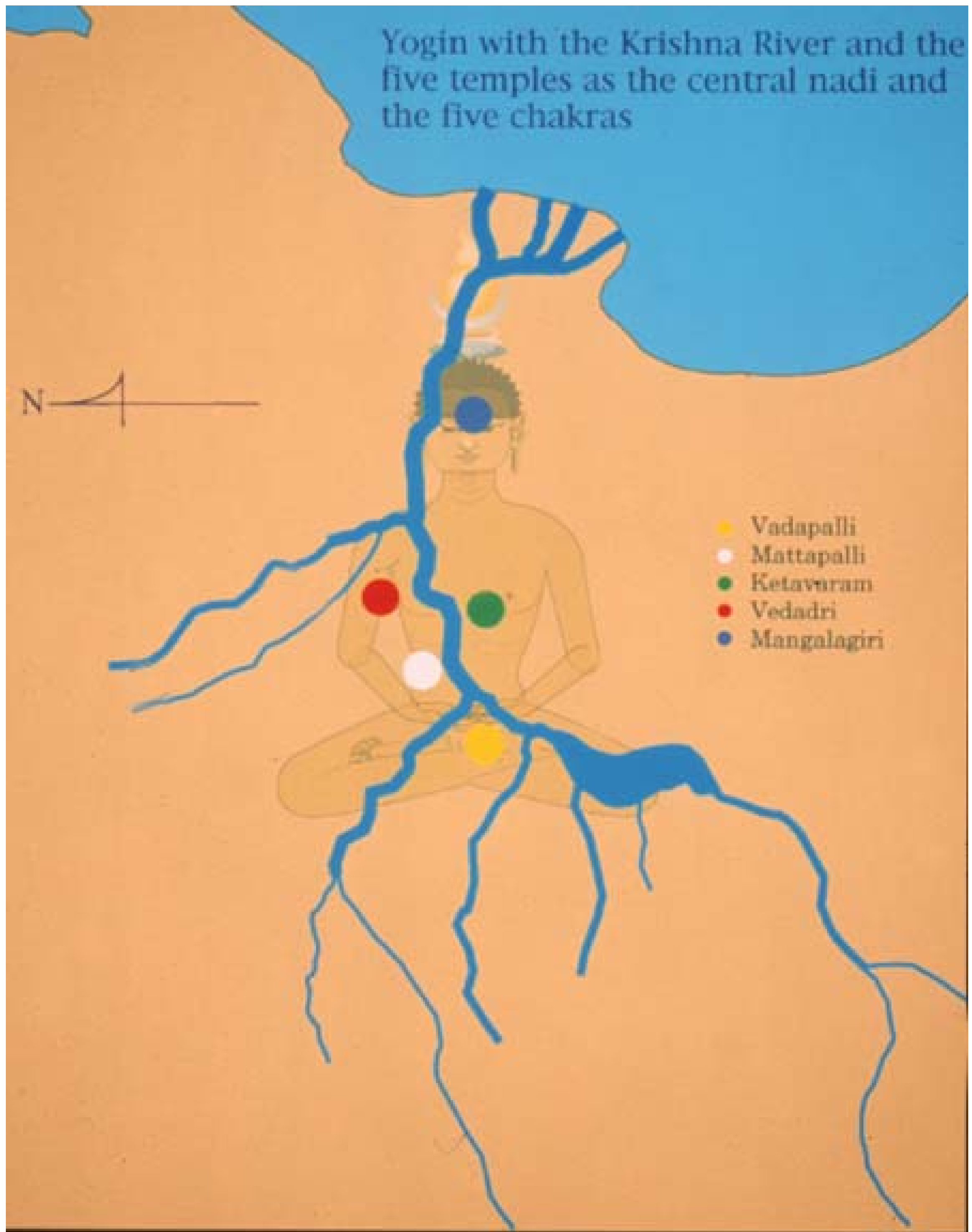


Figure 5.23. Kṛṣṇā River and the five Nṛsiṁha temples as the meditational process of a *yogin.*
Drawing by John C. Huntington.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The worship of Nṛsiṁha, the fourth incarnation of the Hindu god Viṣṇu, is an important religious practice in Andhra Pradesh, India, as evidenced by the hundreds of temples dedicated to this deity. Among these are five Nṛsiṁha temples, located along the Kṛṣṇā River, that are considered by the devotees to be a discrete religious collective. The primary aim of this dissertation was to examine the role of Nṛsiṁha at the five temples and to situate the deity within the broader parameters of Vaiṣṇava practices in Andhra Pradesh. More broadly, this study is an examination of not only the five temple sites, but also their impact on the culture of the surrounding areas. This means a complete interlocking of the geographic, social, economic, and the ritual aspects of the temples, and the factors contributing to their renewal and continuity.

While the present structures are of relatively recent date, the *sthalapurāṇās* (sacred histories) and the factual records at each site have been merged, so that the temples are regarded as restorations from the time of their sacred foundations. Likewise, we cannot disregard the authenticity

of the temples, as created and justified merely through their sacred histories, because like all growing traditions, the role of the five temples changed to accommodate the diverse and shifting local needs.

Variously patronized at different time periods, the five temples reveal a complex interplay between their iconographies and the related ritual practices. The iconography corresponds to the contending sectarian affiliations, the Pāñcarātras and the Vaikhānasas, reflecting the fact that the two movements may, at any one time, be engaged in the process of creating and building on their own religious history. That the temples are Tantric is unquestionable. The female aspect of the deity, Lakṣmī, is as significant as the male aspect Nṛsiṁha in Vaiṣṇava religious methodology. The importance of Lakṣmīnṛsiṁha as the central shrine image in all the five temples conveys that the relationship between the two deities is an indivisible unity.

It is apparent that geography has played an important part in shaping the identity of the five temples. First, the temples are directly linked to the features of the landscape itself, such as hilltops, confluence of rivers, caves, and outcroppings of rocks. Secondly, the fact that these are the only five Nṛsiṁha temples along the banks of the Kṛṣṇā River in Andhra Pradesh, suggests a deliberate intention in their role as a collective. The intermittent role of the river and the goddess Lakṣmī make the Kṛṣṇā an integral part of the temples' iconography. Further, the location and the placement of the temples reflect Tantric yogic practices that constitute underlying methods in

Hindu worship. The five temples and the Kṛṣṇā River are an analogy to the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of the practitioner's body.

Finally, the five temples are linked to each other, not only as religious monuments, but a living organism, where each part is related to the whole. Journey towards or between the five temples is an auspicious act in itself. As S. M. Bharadwaj points out, *tīrtha-yātra* (pilgrimage) not only means the physical act of visiting holy places but also implies mental and moral discipline and the recognition of an inner power.[1] Daily ritual observances and yogic practices at the five temples imply external and internal attainments by means of parallel activities. Physical worship gradually makes way to an inner form of contemplation which leads the practitioner from the gross to the subtle levels of consciousness. The process of undertaking a journey to the Nṛsiṁha temples may be seen as constructing a sacred geography and ritually defining a sacred space. The paradigm set by this grouping of the five Nṛsiṁha temples, as expressions of Vaiṣṇava practices, indicates the need to revisit other temple collectives within the state.

[1] S.M. Bhardwaj. *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India.* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pvt., Ltd., 1999, p.2.

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